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OR,
Redgrave, the Renegade.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "HOT HEART, THE SPY," "OLD
BALDY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WRONG TO BE RIGHTED.

"DRIVE like the wind! Don't spare your horse—kill him by over-driving if you will, and I will pay the bill. Such a paltry sum as he is worth counts for nothing in a case like this. Drive on—drive like the fiends, for there is dark work to be done to-night; a wrong to be righted, and revenge to be secured. Drive on!"

The order seemed scarcely necessary, for the carriage was rolling along the rough road as fast as two spirited horses could take it; far faster than was safe, with the mountain chasms yawning along the way.

The imperious speaker saw not the chasms, nor the lofty peaks of the Rockies which towered around them. His mind was elsewhere, and a fever of impatience and vindictive hatred burned in his veins.

"THAT'S IT—MURDER HAS BEEN DONE, AND THERE IS HIM WHO DONE IT!"
HE LEVELED ONE FINGER AT PAUL REDGRAVE.

The driver was Dusky Drake, a reinsman well known along the foothills, but never before had he been called upon to go over the road at such a furious rate.

His passengers were an old man and a young lady, his daughter. Drake knew them well. Horace Brotherton had been the leading man of Bullion Bar for some years, and there were few in the vicinity who had not heard of him.

If Lucia Brotherton shared her father's excitement, there was nothing to reveal the fact; she reclined in the carriage, and, with her gaze fixed ever straight ahead, might have been taken for a beautiful statue. Once or twice Dusky Drake glanced curiously back at her, wondering at her silence.

Perhaps this regard recalled her to herself, for she suddenly aroused and looked at her father.

"Don't borrow trouble," she said, in a quiet, soothing voice. "It is bad enough, Heaven knows; but all hope is not gone. We may regain our own. This is no longer a place ruled by mob law. At any rate, remain calm until you know all is lost."

"How can I, when I know those scoundrels have possession of our earthly all?" Brotherton fiercely demanded.

"They may be driven out if—"

"Well, if what?"

"The law is on our side."

"Did you ever hear the expression, 'Possession is nine points of the law?' There's a good deal in it, and Stamford has possession—thanks to Paul Redgrave."

"Thanks to Paul Redgrave!" echoed Lucia, like one in a dream.

"Curse him!"

The words fell fiercely from Horace Brotherton's lips, and Lucia shivered and drew her shawl closer around her shapely shoulders. Yet, the evening was warm.

"Perhaps he is not so much to blame?"

"Has he not tamely given Stamford possession? He is a renegade, a villain! And he owes everything to me; I was the making of him. He would have been a wretched beggar, and I lifted him to our own level. What is my reward?"

"Wait and see him."

"I will see him, to his sorrow. Lucia, it is a pity that men and women do not grow wise as they grow old. My brother was a fool to marry that wretched, nameless woman; I was a fool to hope her viper offspring could ever be made an honest man."

The girl did not answer, and then there was a brief silence. Suddenly Brotherton turned to her.

"Lucia, is there more to this than is known to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"You and Paul Redgrave were once fast friends. Of late there has been coldness, if not enmity, between you. It has not occurred to me before, but I see it now! What was the trouble?"

Again Lucia Brotherton drew her shawl tightly around her shoulders.

"There was no trouble," she said, in a calm, almost expressionless voice.

"I can't believe that," replied the father, his suspicions fully awakened. "There was something, I am sure. Can it be he mentioned marriage to you, was refused, and—took revenge by betraying us to our enemies?"

"Nonsense!" replied the girl, quickly, but her voice was hard. "You are too imaginative. Nothing of the kind ever occurred between us."

"Don't deceive me at this time, Lucia. If I have surmised the cause of Redgrave's treachery, don't try to blind me. Remember what is at stake."

"I do remember, and I repeat—Paul Redgrave never asked me to marry him. You are entirely wrong. I can give no clew to his conduct, and you must seek information of him."

"I'll do it at the revolver's muzzle."

Lucia started violently.

"Father!"

"Well?"

"Surely, you would not harm him."

"I have a revolver in my coat pocket, and if I find him as much a traitor as circumstances now indicate, I will shoot him as I would a wolf. But he may run—Drive on, man! Lay on the whip! We are crawling! I want to get there and have this matter settled. My blood is boiling, and though I never harmed a human being before, I am hungry for blood now. Drive on!"

"You have no right to go there in your present mood," urged Lucia.

Her father turned upon her fiercely.

"Enough of this, girl. If your sympathies are with Paul Redgrave you will do well to keep the fact a secret. Not another word!"

Lucia obeyed, once more sinking back to the depths of the cushioned seat; one more gazing out into the dusk with the fixed look of one who realizes nothing that passes before her eyes.

Horace Brotherton had been a fairly successful business man in the East, but in the waning years of his life he had been seized with the passion for making a fortune at one bound, so he sought the West and entered on a new career.

He had brought with him only his daughter

and Paul Redgrave, by courtesy called his nephew. Horace had had two brothers, Rufus and Samuel. The latter had remained single until he reached middle life, and when he married he made a mistake.

His choice had been a woman of the lower walk of life, taken from an Eastern city. From the start his relatives disapproved of the marriage, and there was a small breeze when it was found that the wife, instead of being a single woman, as she had represented, was a widow with one child.

When she confessed this fact even her husband was very angry, but he forgave the deception, sought out the boy, who was then ten years of age, rescued him from the city slums, and took him to his own home. This boy was Paul Redgrave.

During the two years that followed no relative crossed Samuel Brotherton's threshold, but they knew that all was not peace and happiness there. The charitable said that Mrs. Brotherton was like a wild bird caged; that she could not bring herself down to the tame life of her home. On the other hand, there were reports that she was an evil, unscrupulous woman, and, as usual, the worst reports were believed.

After two years, news came to Horace Brotherton that his brother and his wife had both died of sudden fever. Only Paul remained. What was to be done with him?

Horace saw the boy and was favorably impressed, despite his contrary wishes in the case. Paul seemed frank, open and honest. The man took time to think, and, in the end, undertook to care for the boy. But not under his own roof—ah! no; he would as soon have taken a viper there.

Paul was put at school. Brotherton watched him with suspicion. He expected evil reports, but none came; all who knew the boy spoke very highly of him, and though it seemed preposterous to the self-appointed guardian that a child of the slums could be really honorable, he had to yield a point against his will.

At last Paul graduated from a fairly good school. He was put in a business house. In a year he had made the reputation of being shrewd, careful, honest, and a natural business man.

Brotherton had an eye to the main chance, and he saw the importance of having such a person in his own employ. He acted on this idea, and for four years previous to the date of our story Paul had, as far as he knew, served him faithfully.

Two years before this night the elder man removed to Bullion Bar, and since that time Paul had lived in his own family. Circumstances had compelled him to trust the young man, and he had really given him more power than he realized, but a vague distrust had always been in his mind.

At last it seemed that his worst views were confirmed—that the child of the slums still had the taint of evil in his blood.

When Brotherton reached Bullion Bar he purchased Montana Mill and went to work to accumulate his desired fortune.

The mill had been built a few years before by some one who thought he saw a chance to make money in a way new to Bullion Bar. New citizens were daily coming to the vicinity. Back in the gulches were miners who threw together a few shanties for their temporary occupancy. Material was needed for these. But the chief idea was to supply the scores of villages which were everywhere springing up, and in which were needed boards and furniture.

Brotherton saw even more in Montana Mill. Back on the mountain-side were hundreds of acres of timber; an almost inexhaustible supply. He began work with the idea of supplying all the prairie country west of the Mississippi, and making his the greatest concern in the far West.

His idea had been successful, and the value of his property had increased until he saw his dreams of fortune in a fair way of being realized, but, all had apparently gone to ruin.

A fortnight before he went away on business, accompanied by his daughter. Startling news had since reached him.

One Cephas Stamford had put in an appearance and claimed Montana Mill as his property, declaring that he who had deeded the mill to Brotherton had had no right whatever to it. Upon what basis the claim was made Brotherton did not yet know, but Redgrave, who had been left in charge, had promptly turned over all to the new claimant.

Brotherton was almost wild with rage. He had made enemies in, and around, Bullion Bar, simply by his successes, and he knew these men would gladly side against him.

He had great fears that Montana Mill had passed forever from his control.

His fiercest anger turned against Redgrave. This man, whom he had raised from obscurity and disgrace, whom he had honored and trusted, had turned against him basely. Without testing the matter at law he had, report said, given Stamford possession without opposition.

This fact made Horace Brotherton's blood boil, and as they rolled over the mountain trail he clinched and unclenched his trembling hands nervously.

"Blood will tell!—blood will tell!" he often muttered. "I was a fool to ever trust the spawn of the viper; no good could come from one who had that woman's blood in his veins. The nourishment she gave her babe was a subtle poison which has now broken out. But the renegade shall feel my vengeance—I swear it!"

And his hand touched the revolver which nestled in his pocket, while his face grew darker and more menacing.

But Lucia said nothing—stirred not. Still was her gaze fixed straight ahead, vacantly, unswerving. What was in her mind? Her father did not pause to wonder. If he had, he would have despaired to read the greatest of riddles—woman.

But the carriage rolled on, and then, turning a sudden corner, dashed across a level and drew up at the door of Montana Mill.

It was not so late but a light burned in the office, and Brotherton's keen gaze saw that one man was there, and alone. It was Paul Redgrave.

A smile, hard and bitter, crossed the old man's face. Once more he touched his revolver, then sprung to the ground.

"It will soon be settled!" he darkly muttered.

CHAPTER II.

THE RENEGADE AT BAY.

BROTHERTON pushed open the office door and strode in with a heavy step. He was too much interested in other matters to think of Lucia, but she followed close after him. He was excited and flushed with anger, but her face was as calm as when they were crossing the range—unnaturally calm, it seemed.

A man who had been sitting at the desk arose as they entered, and they stood facing Paul Redgrave.

He was not a man to attract marked attention from a casual observer, but others might have found that face impressive. It was certainly a strong face, with square jaws and a firm mouth barely visible under his mustache. Yet he was plain looking, and might have been homely, with his irregular features, swarthy complexion and coarse black hair, had it not been for his general expression of intelligence.

Their entrance evidently surprised him, and a quick change passed over his face. He looked startled—almost dismayed.

"So you are here!" exclaimed Brotherton, abruptly.

"Yes, sir."

Redgrave seemed to speak mechanically, and he looked not at the elder man, but at Lucia.

"Well, by the fiends, I am here, too, and I have come for a settlement!"

Brotherton brought his hand fiercely down on the desk, and his set face was white with rage, but Paul seemed almost to have forgotten his presence; he looked at Lucia and remained silent.

"Do you hear?" shouted Brotherton.

"Yes, sir, and it shall be attended to."

"What shall be attended to?"

Redgrave started and came back to the present, drawing a deep breath as he did so.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, quietly. "I was thinking of something else. I am now ready to listen to you."

"Well, you're a cool one! You play Judas Iscariot, and when you have got my enemies fairly in my place, meet me as coolly as though nothing had occurred."

"I presume you refer to Cephas Stamford, sir," calmly answered Redgrave. "Well, you told me when you went away to use my judgment in any emergency which might occur. Stamford presented proofs of his right to Montana Mill which convinced me, and I accordingly gave him possession. I thought you would want justice done."

"Justice?" Brotherton bitterly echoed. "Are you aware that I put every dollar I possessed into this property when I came here?"

"Yes, but it seems that the man who sold to you had no legal right to the property."

"Was that for you to settle? Were you judge or jury?"

"No, but I was—"

"A traitor and a scoundrel!" thundered the angry old man. "Thank Heaven I still have a chance to appeal to law, and I may win these, but your crime cannot be made less. Oh! you renegade, is it in this way that you repay me for all I have done for you?"

"Haven't you always told me to do justice to all men?—to be honest and conscientious?"

"Words, empty words—the weak device of a fool. It will not aid you. Paul Redgrave, I raised you from the slums to real manhood—fool that I was. I might have known how I would be repaid. Blood will tell, and there is no good in you. With a mother like yours you must needs be a—"

Redgrave put out one hand quickly.

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "Say what you will of me, but not one word against my mother!"

"I shall say what I please, and do the same!" was the angry retort. "Oh! I am not through with you, yet: you don't know why I came here, Judas. I came as an avenger, and, by Heaven, I will have my satisfaction. You who should have been my best friend, owing as much

to me as you did, have ruined me; but, there is still a way left, Judas. When I heard what you had done I swore that I would kill you, and I will keep my word. This is the reward of your treachery!"

The fiery old man had been working himself up to even a more intemperate pitch, and at the last words he suddenly drew his revolver and thrust it out toward Redgrave.

The latter saw his danger, but made no effort to avert it. Instead, his hands remained hanging idly by his side and he faced his would-be slayer calmly.

Brotherton drew back the hammer with nervous fingers, and then pressed the trigger. A click followed, but no report.

The weapon had missed fire.

Never before had it failed its master, and he drew it back toward his own eyes, divining the truth at once. The weapon had not a cartridge in the cylinder!

Before he could fully understand this Lucia moved to his side and laid her hand on his arm.

"Blame me!" she said, quietly. "I appropriated the weapon for a time and removed the cartridges coming over the range."

"How dared you?" Brotherton demanded, a red flush on his face.

"I did it so that you need not keep the threat you had made."

"And I owe my life to you, Miss Brotherton," said Redgrave, looking at her with eyes which expressed a good deal, yet told no definite tale; a dozen emotions seemed mixed there.

Lucia did not even return his gaze.

"Think well before you do that of which you would be sorry when too late, father," she continued. "It is not for man to take human life. Let God's creatures live until He calls them home."

"Rubbish!" Brotherton cried. "You plead with your heart, not your head. What is between you and this ungrateful wretch?"

Redgrave flushed a little, but the marble pallor of Lucia's face did not change. Her father caught her wrist fiercely.

"Do you love him—this most diabolical scoundrel?" he demanded. "Answer that question! By all my hopes of Heaven, I would kill you here rather than have it so—"

"Rest easy," the girl interrupted, in a hard voice. "You need carry your mistake no further. Paul Redgrave and I are nothing to each other. Is it not so, Mr. Redgrave?"

"We are nothing to each other," he echoed in a voice that really sounded like an echo—afar off.

Brotherton stood glancing from one to the other. Before that night he had never had a suspicion which connected Lucia with a falsehood. Now he was ready to suspect even her, but his gaze gradually softened as he looked.

"You are all I have," he said. "I cannot believe you would turn against me."

"Nor would I. Do not think that; do not let your disappointment run riot with reason."

The elder man hesitated, and then the door opened and a fourth person entered the office—a woman, young and beautiful. She had evidently not expected to see those who were assembled there, for she paused suddenly just beyond the threshold.

Brotherton looked perplexed, but Redgrave spoke in an awkward way.

"This is Miss Alicia Stamford, daughter of Cephas Stamford, Mr. Brotherton."

"So, it is one of the claimants?"

The new-comer dropped a mocking courtesy.

"And you are another!" she said, a smile coming to her face easily.

"I am the true, only owner of Montana Mill, woman," was the fierce reply. "By all the moral rights of man I—"

"Excuse me, sir, but I am neither judge nor jury," flippantly interrupted Miss Stamford. "Don't bother me with chatter about the case. Go to my father."

"Rest assured, I shall go to him."

"Rest assured, he will receive you, but don't play the bravo with a woman."

"You are wise in this, if in nothing else. I'll obey you, but that usurper, your father, shall have no reason to say that he overawed me."

Brotherton turned away. He then saw that Lucia had changed her position, but his own conversation had prevented him from seeing a little scene which had occurred almost at his side.

While he had been occupied Lucia had gone quickly to Redgrave's side. The pallor was gone from her fair face, and she not only showed interest but strong emotion.

"If I had known this I would never have interfered to save you," she said, in a sibilant voice. "I would have let the cartridges remain in the revolver."

"What do you mean?" he asked, slowly.

"That woman—I know her!"

"It is not my fault that she came here."

"Ah! but she is here, and it is no wonder that you gave up Montana Mill at her request!"

"Lucia," Redgrave exclaimed, passionately. "I swear to you—"

"Swear to those who will believe you; I know you too well. I can plainly see, now, why you

turned against us and became the creature of the Stamfords. So that is who *she* is! I will remember well, and I tell you it will be a hard fight which wrests Montana Mill away from us."

With these words, bitterly spoken, she turned away, and the reply Paul Redgrave would have made was never spoken.

Brotherton suspected nothing as he turned to them, and after a short pause he managed to speak with a degree of calmness.

"Redgrave, I shall yield to my daughter's arguments and spare you for now. Somehow, I feel that I do not care to have your blood on my hands, after all. I feel suddenly weak. But it will pass, and that, too, quickly. I am going to law, and if there is one spark of justice I will have my own again. When it is done I shall know what to do with you. If I am successful, I will drive you out among your old friends of the scums. If I fail, there will be cartridges in my revolver next time."

With this significant observation, he held out his hand to Lucia.

"Come, let us go," he added. "We will leave this precious pair here."

"No you won't!" retorted Alicia, with a toss of her head. "I came to tell Mr. Redgrave to close the office, and my work is now done."

With these words she quickly left the room. Brotherton and Lucia followed, not deigning another glance at Redgrave. Outside the building Brotherton paused.

"I must ask you to go home alone, my dear," he said with unusual kindness. "I have other business which will employ my time for awhile."

"Let me go with you."

"No, I prefer to go alone, and it is time you were at rest. You must be weary."

"You will not see Redgrave again?"

"No."

"Do you solemnly promise?"

"I do; I don't want another sight of his face."

"Hush! Here he comes, now—he is closing the building. Stay with me until he goes on."

And so they stood together while Redgrave locked up and put the key away in his pocket; then passed them and went away toward the north. If he saw them he gave no sign. He walked slowly away, with lowered head, like one in deep thought.

"Studying more mischief," muttered Brotherton.

Lucia shivered.

"I did not think he was so bad," she said.

"He's of what the timber murderers are made of," was the curt reply. "Well, he's gone, and I must go too. Good-night, Lucia."

"Good-night!"

He had made a motion to start her homeward and she obeyed the decree; but, after going a few yards, she paused and watched his own form as it faded away in the darkness.

She saw him go with a vague feeling of apprehension. He had followed in Paul Redgrave's footsteps, and though he had promised not to again talk with the younger man, she felt ill at ease.

"I wish I had insisted on going with him," she thought. "What if they should meet and quarrel? Paul is younger, stronger—Pshaw! he is not the man to do a deed as bad as that. I'll go home and think no more about it."

"With this resolution she turned away and left the place. It was only a short walk home, and she reached it safely. Then she sat down to await her father's return. She had long to wait.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE FOOT-BRIDGE.

THE town of Bullion Bar was situated on both sides of Black Run, but the buildings on the north side were not only all dwellings but few, scattered and humble at that; the well-to-do people of the south side had rather a poor opinion of those who lived north.

Of these perhaps the best known was a man commonly called "The Black Shark." His real name was supposed to be Sharkey, but those who believed that they knew him thought that the other name applied better.

He lived in a shanty north of the river, his only companion being his daughter, Bess, and that was about all that was known of them. Even the humblest of their neighbors never visited them; they had a bad name.

The Black Shark ostensibly made his living in his boat. Fish were abundant in Black Run, and as other people seemed to be too busy to catch them, it was left to Sharkey to supply the town. Besides this, he earned something by ferrying parties across the stream. No bridge had ever been built, and though there was one way of crossing, it was often ignored and the boatman's services called in use.

Such was his outward way of living, but many believed that if the truth was known things would be recorded against the Black Shark not so much to his credit.

There had been mysterious disappearances of men around Bullion Bar, and though there were some who viewed the matter philosophically and said that all Western towns had similar myster-

ies, others heard of these cases with a shrug of their shoulders and the remark:

"The Black Shark has been catching fish!"

The boatman was a sullen, unsocial man, and his daughter resembled him. Bess Sharkey had no intimates, and no friends. Some who had seen her had been attracted by her acknowledged beauty, and would have tried to learn if there was any good in her nature, but she repelled all advances and continued her lovely, unnatural life.

"A chip of the old block," was the general verdict, and no one had a good word for her.

On the night of the previous scenes Sharkey was out on the river in his boat. He had been fishing, and even after darkness fell and he ceased to get even a nibble, he had dangled his line in the water and swung idly with the current.

Finally he prepared to leave, raised the anchor and let the boat float.

"Poor luck!" he muttered, disconsolately. "Ther villainous fish won't bite, an' I'm in need o' money. I'm always in need o' money, an' ther locker is always empty. Thar is no fun in bein' poor. I would be content if I had strength like other men; I'd fairly doat on hard work; but my poor arms are weak—drefful weak."

The last remark was one he had often made, and it may be he had come to believe it himself, but it remained a fact that nobody in Bullion Bar had a better physical development than he; his shoulders and arms looked like those of a gladiator.

He did not offer to touch the oars, and the boat floated on toward the dam, which was one of the principal features of Bullion Bar.

When it became necessary to dam the river, to furnish water-power for the mill, it was seen at a glance that Nature had done much to aid the work. At one point the bed of the stream was wide, but it narrowed and led between two walls of rock with a giant boulder half-way between the two—a splendid chance for a dam, which was duly improved.

After it was finished, the boulder was made use of and a foot-bridge constructed just above the edge of the dam—a means of crossing often utilized, but one which all admitted was far from safe.

A fall from the foot-bridge would almost inevitably carry the adventurer over the dam, and, below, the falling water was churned to a white foam on the ragged rocks.

Sharkey was not afraid of the fall, however; the water was calm almost to the edge, and he could handle his boat with great skill.

As he floated down he could see the foot-bridge outlined against the lower edge of the sky like a black band. Then he saw something else. A higher, but not stationary, object became visible, and a man advanced along the narrow bridge.

The boatman gave a sniff of disapproval.

"Another man too mighty mean ter help an honest man git a livin'. I hope he'll fall off an' break his durned back!"

He watched the pedestrian, who moved very slowly in the gloom, and thus became witness of an unexpected scene. The unknown had gone half-way across the bridge when some dark object suddenly rose before him, and he was brought to a halt.

"Mighty risky!"

Sharkey uttered the two words unconsciously, for no one knew better than he that no two men could safely pass each other on the bridge, which seemed to be the intention of one, but almost in the same instant the scene assumed a new aspect.

He who had been crouching on the bridge flung out his arms and grasped the pedestrian, and a cry fell from the latter's lips.

"Stop! for Heaven's sake let go, Redgrave—"

The boatman heard no more. The speech ended in a startled cry, but it was cut short. There was a brief contention of the two figures, and then only one remained on the foot-bridge. He who had tried to cross had gone over helplessly, while the lately-crouching man remained peering after him like a triumphant demon.

"Murder!" whispered the Black Shark.

"He's flung him over, an' that means sure death. 'Redgrave!' That's the name o' him that is overseer in the mill, an' I reckon he's got one enemy ther less. Fa! ha! you're right in luck, Sharkey! Here's one more secret fur you ter know, an' thar is money in it."

He rubbed his hands, but, struck by a sudden thought, suddenly raised his ears and plunged them in the water. His skill stood him in good use and scarcely a sound arose to betray him, but luck was not all on his side.

Some animal plunged sullenly into the water, and the man on the foot-bridge suddenly stood erect, looked apprehensively around, and then hurried toward the northern bank.

Sharkey growled an oath and pulled stoutly at the oars, rowing a stroke which soon took him to the bank. Once there he pulled his craft half-ashore with a quick motion and then ran up the ascent.

When he reached the level all was quiet around him, and, look as he might, he could see no other human being. He ran about like a dog seeking the scent, but all in vain.

"Gone!" he muttered, disconsolately. "Ther blamed critter hez cl'ared out, an' I can't hev no interview with him ter-night. Never mind; I know him, an' I know what he has done. Aha! Mister Redgrave, you an' me will be good friends arter this night's work!"

Chuckling, he turned his face back toward the dam. The tragedy he had witnessed there gave the place a new attraction for him, and he went out on the foot-bridge slowly and carefully.

Nobody was to be seen there, and all was quiet save the roar of the falling water. He located the spot from which the unknown had fallen, and looked greedily down. He did not expect to see any one, but was looking almost mechanically.

"He's a dead duck," Sharkey muttered. "Nobody kin go over there an' live. Ugh! it's an ugly-lookin' place."

He spoke the truth. Even in the night the bed of the stream at the foot of the fall was white as snow. There was a particularly remorseless look about the jagged rocks, but the Black Shark chuckled as he looked down.

"It was a good way ter git red o' an enemy, but ther question is, who was he? I must know."

Returning to the bank he made a detour and reached a point below the falls. Here he began a patient search, though without much hope of success. With the darkness and the troubled water against him, his chances were not of the best.

He kept at work, however, until the passage of time warned him away; then went up the bank, rowed his boat to its usual place and started for home. He went in deep thought, for he anticipated great good to him from what he had seen.

Some poor wretch had gone to his death, but he had no idea of publicly telling what he had seen. Thinking only of himself, he saw a better way of helping his own cause.

"He shall pay me well ter keep ther secret; right well," Sharkey chuckled, once more rubbing his broad hands.

It was not a long walk to his shanty. Neither was the latter a prepossessing place. It was thrust in among the bleak rocks where space was scarce, and seemed to have caught the barren spirit of the vicinity.

No wayfarer would willingly have selected it as a lodging-place, were he ever so humble, for it had a dreary, sinister aspect even in the broad light of day.

Sharkey strode up to the door, but suddenly came to a halt.

"Voices!" he muttered, suspiciously. "Who ther blazes is hyar? Visitors at my shanty! Huh! wonder ef Bess has made a friend?"

He grinned at an idea so absurd, and then crept toward the miserable little window and looked in. Bess was there, standing not far away, a sullen expression on her face, while on one of the rough chairs sat a man.

Sharkey's wonder increased. A man—a stranger—was in his shanty. Who was he? Why was he there?

The stranger was young and good-looking, and he faced the daughter of the shanty with a good-humored smile, peculiarly at variance with her sullen look. He was talking, and gesticulating as he spoke.

"Now, I can't see any use for conduct like yours," he was saying. "Leaving my own interests out of the case, I hate to see such nonsense in a pretty girl like—"

"Don't talk nonsense!" Bess curtly interrupted. "I don't want to hear any of your gallant speeches."

"But 'tis said that the truth should be spoken at all times," urged the visitor.

"Well, I won't hear your nonsense, and that settles it," was the sharp reply.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"Perverse, like all your sex."

"See here, Mr. Bradlock, or whatever your name is, this has gone far enough. If you are not an escaped idiot, don't act like one. It won't work around here. One thing more: I've told you that you are not wanted here. Now, I'll say one thing more: If the master of this house comes home and finds you here, he won't receive you as a friend."

"Amiable Jake Sharkey! I've heard of him, and I can swear that I don't hanker for his friendship. But now we are speaking of him, let us go further. May I ask you one question?"

"All you wish, but I shall only answer such as I wish."

"Well, then, what has become of the woman who was living in your family ten years ago?"

There was a sudden start outside the window, and the Black Shark's hand fell unconsciously on the revolver at his belt. A startled look had appeared on his bronzed face, and he leaned further forward and peered wolfishly at the stranger in his shanty.

CHAPTER IV.

SHARKEY'S KNIFE.

WHATEVER significance lurked in the stranger's words was thrown away on Bess. Her father might see something in the last question

to startle him, but she did not. She gave her head an impatient toss, and answered:

"So you are going poking into a graveyard, are you? Well, I admire your taste, I do."

"Thanks," coolly remarked Bradlock. "Appreciation by beauty is always pleasant. But the woman—what did you say had become of her?"

"Do you mean Meg Warner?"

"Yes."

"She went away—to California or China, I forget which. You'll have to go somewhere else to get your information. I know nothing about her, so say no more. Once more I want to say to you that you had better be conspicuous by your absence when my father comes home."

"Why should amiable Jake Sharkey fear inquiry in regard to Meg Warner?"

"Who said he did?"

"Didn't you?"

"You know I didn't."

"But don't you think it?"

"No!"

Curtly enough came the answer, and Bess turned away, walked to the window and stood looking out into the darkness. It was not the window where the Black Shark crouched, and so he remained unseen.

Bradlock looked after her with a peculiar expression. His mouth wore a smile, but his eyes were keen, and he seemed studying her sharply. This was his peculiarity—he could talk nonsense, and did, but he saw everything.

Was his careless manner but a mask?

"Bessie," he continued, lightly, "I know there can be no love between you and Jake Sharkey, and you are too fine a girl to waste your life in this barren place. Talk freely with me—tell what you know, and I will help you out of this den, make you an honored woman, and—"

Here Bradlock paused. Bess had wheeled around with an angry, unpromising expression on her dusky face; but there was more in the matter.

The door had been flung open, and there stood Jake Sharkey, his eyes blazing with fury, and his face white. More than this, he held in his hand a long-bladed knife, and his appearance was enough to startle even a well-nerved person.

"I'm here!" he almost shouted; "an' ef you want ter quiz anybody, I'm ther huckleberry fer you ter tackle, I be. Talk ter me, will yer?"

And he made a sweep in the air with the murderous-looking knife.

An ugly picture he made, but Mr. Bradlock had never been calmer outwardly.

"Hallo, Sharkey, old man!" he jovially replied; "how are you? Come back laden with fish until you are fairly round-shouldered, eh? Well, how's things, anyhow—on wheels?"

"Cuss you, you can't put me off that way!"

"Who the blooming mischief wants to put you off?"

"I've heerd all ye've said."

"What of it?"

"Bradlock was leaning carelessly back in his chair, seeming to be very much at his ease.

"So you want ter find Meg Warner?" growled the Black Shark, who seemed staggered by such coolness.

"Yes."

"What do you want o' her?"

"Produce her, and I'll tell."

Sharkey put away his knife. He had come in prepared to fight and kill Bradlock if he could, but his unexpected reception had changed his mind, and he now took a new tack.

"Meg's gone," he announced.

"Where?"

"Don't know—left fur ther East years ago."

"How did she go?"

"How do I know? She started in Dave Bigler's stage, an' I s'pose she kept on by car."

"I don't suppose anything of the kind, for she did not start in Bigler's stage. There are those, amiable Jacob, who say she never left town alive."

Sharkey appeared startled again.

"Who says that?"

"Your old neighbors."

"They're liars! all infernal liars! I'd just like ter wipe my knife on 'em a few times."

"You're altogether too free with your knife, friend Sharkey. I'll wager something you would not want to tell its full record."

"See hyar, you, who ther devil be you, anyhow?" the Black Shark suspiciously growled.

"Bradlock, by name; driftwood, by nature and practice. You see, there are some men so utterly useless in this world that they don't amount to a red. I'm one of that sort. Knowing this fact I wander about here and there like an unquiet ghost."

"You'll wander too much for yer own good yet," darkly observed Sharkey.

"What of it? Neither chick nor child have I, and if I turn up my toes not a tear would be shed. Pleasant state of affairs, old man, ain't it?"

Light was the stranger's manner, and his mouth smiled good-humoredly, but his eyes looked at the Shark gravely, keenly.

"Critter," said the fisherman, "I want to talk

with you privately. This hyar's no place. Women's ears is near, an' ther man who talks privacy afore a woman is a fool."

"You're a fool to think so, Jacob, and I feel compelled to apologize to Bessie in the name of my sex."

The stranger removed his hat and bowed to the cabin-girl with grave grace; but for once Bess had no retort. She was looking from Bradlock to her father and back again with a peculiar expression on her face. Sharkey shrugged his broad shoulders scornfully, and then continued:

"Wal, will you step outside, stranger?"

"Certainly, Jacob."

Sharkey's hand descended until it rested over a pocket. In that pocket he had just put his knife, and his lips parted with the suggestion of a triumphant smile. Bradlock did not see it. He was looking at Bess. She crossed the room quickly, passing near him, and then sat down by the window, turned her back to them and relapsed into the semblance of a statue.

As she passed Bradlock, however, she had uttered three quick, cautious words:

"Beware! Don't go!"

Her father did not hear them. If the stranger did he gave no sign. He was looking at her carelessly, and seemed in a reverie until Sharkey again spoke.

"Well, are you goin'?"

"All ready, Jacob. Lead on, and we will talk to the dim stars and brooding clouds, or words to that effect. Lead on!"

Sharkey obeyed. At the door the stranger passed and looked back.

"Good-night, Bessie," he said, nonchalantly.

No answer; no movement of the figure by the window. Bess might have been the statue she was imitating, so cold and silent was she. Bradlock muttered two or three words under his breath, smiled and followed Jake Sharkey out.

When the door closed Bess aroused, turned and looked after them.

"The fool is going to his death!" she muttered, "but he would have it so. I warned him. Now if he wants to go out and let the Black Shark kill him like a wolf, so be it. I warned him—why did I do it? I am not in the habit of coming between Jake Sharkey and his prey, but this man—this Bradlock—is different from other men I have met. I wish—bah! let the fool go to his fate. I warned him!"

She had listened to the footsteps which died away, and she still listened—listened now to hear the painful silence broken. She knew Jake Sharkey's way; she knew he had never asked Bradlock outside for any good motive.

She shivered, arose and began pacing the room with slow steps and downcast eyes.

"Why did he ask for Meg Warner? She's dead, and has been for years; I know it. Then why does he want to dig up the past? Probably he could tell her story, but I don't want to hear it; I've heard too much already. The less one knows when Jake Sharkey is near, the better."

If she had any daughterly regard for the man it did not show then. It had never shown. In one sense of the word she knew nothing about his affairs, but what she suspected was too much like actual knowledge to allow her to regard him as aught but a human wolf.

Several times as the girl paced the room she paused and listened for sounds outside, but the silence remained unbroken. A revolver shot or a human cry of pain and terror would not have surprised her, but none came.

After several minutes had passed she left the room, ascended a narrow stairway and went to her own quarters—a miserable place, low, unfinished and full of dark corners where odds and ends were piled up.

Bess cared nothing for the dark corners. She was not in any degree timid, and she set down her light and went boldly into one of the darkest recesses. When she came out she dragged a common box after her.

It seemed to have been long unmolested, and cobwebs clung to it like a veil. These she brushed away, and then lifted the cover of the box.

She remembered it well of old. When Meg Warner was a member of their family it had been hers, and whatever had become of the woman and the rest of her effects, this box had never left. Until that night, however, Bess had never had curiosity enough to look into it, and she did not know what awaited her. It was singular that, when she had almost forgotten Meg Warner, her interest was thus awakened.

She began the search unceremoniously, and a coarse, ragged, woman's dress was first exposed to view. This she tossed aside, and the search went on.

The box was not so large, nor the contents so varied as to make it a long task, and in a short time she had reached the bottom. And only the most commonplace of articles lay before her.

She was vaguely disappointed, for she had hoped to find something which would raise Meg Warner out of the oblivion which seemed to have fallen upon her, but she was not surprised. Common sense told her that Jake Sharkey would not willingly leave anything of value unnoticed through all the years.

Believing that she was wasting time she began replacing the articles, one by one.

The last was the old dress before mentioned. As she lifted this her hand suddenly stopped and the garment was not dropped in the box. Her acute touch had noticed a peculiarity, and after a brief pause she began to look for its cause.

"It felt like a paper," she said, aloud, "but—there is nothing in the pocket."

Again her hand moved slowly—then paused. She had found on the inside of one sleeve a place where a slight addition to the general thickness was perceptible, and which had a peculiar feeling.

From her pocket she produced a knife; a few touches of the blade and an opening had been made in the sleeve.

She inserted her fingers—drew them out again—and a small, flat package lay in her hand; a closely-folded paper which, coming from such a peculiar hiding-place, was suddenly invested with importance which was all the greater because it was vague and mysterious. But something else now arrested Bess's attention.

A single line of writing extended across the otherwise blank surface, and she slowly read these words:

"Stolen by Margaret Warner, August 12, 1865."

That was all, but it was enough to add to the girl's interest. The inscription was a peculiar one—would the contents prove the same? She turned the paper to see where it could be opened, but, as she did so, suddenly paused again.

On the paper was a red stain as large as a silver dollar, and its hue was very suggestive to her experienced eyes.

"Blood!" she muttered. "Blood—and on Meg Warner's dress. How came it here? The sleeve is spotted with it—it soaked through to the paper and—"

Once more she paused. For the first time she saw a hole in the side of the dress—a straight, clear slit, such as a knife would naturally make.

Bess was not naturally delicate-nerved, but with a recollection of what Bradlock had said about the Warner woman fresh in her mind, this ugly-looking cut had a peculiar and startling significance.

She went no further, however. The dress was suddenly snatched from her hand, and, turning, she saw Jake Sharkey towering above her, his evil face dark with mixed fear and fury, while in his hand he held a long-bladed knife.

Was there new and dark work for that hand which knew so well how to use a knife?

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S ACCUSATION.

ANOTHER day dawned. The office of the Montana Mill was opened at the usual hour, though the machinery, which had stopped when Cephas Stamford took charge, remained as silent as during the night.

A Chinaman, whose name was Jim Willie, had for several months had the job of sweeping and dusting the office, but since the Stamfords took possession Paul Redgrave had made a practice of arriving as soon as the Chinaman, to make sure he was not molested.

Redgrave was prompt as ever that morning, but he did not seem to be in his usual civil mood. He answered Jim Willie's salutation curtly, and then sat down and remained staring at vacancy with what Jim thought a most forbidding scowl on his face.

"Something gone wrong!" thought the astute Chinaman. "Led'ave no feelce good. Hi! me know! Lucia, she got home last night!"

And he shook his head solemnly and went on widdling his duster. Whatever others might think Jim Willie believed that Redgrave loved Lucia Brotherton, and he could not exactly see how Redgrave was going to serve two masters.

"Him velly much foolce to be Stamford's man," was the Celestial's unspoken verdict.

Perhaps Redgrave thought so, or it might be that more important matters were on his mind. Be that as it may, there he sat and stared out of the door, off at the beetling mountain cliffs, and the scowl did not leave his face until, seeing that Jim was through with his work, he suddenly aroused and went to his desk.

He had just taken up a package of papers when another step sounded and an elderly man entered. He was small and thin-faced, but his was a face of power. A man of brains he undoubtedly was—intelligent, shrewd, cold and calculating; a person likely to make the most of all opportunities and win victories where many men would fail.

Such was Cephas Stamford, now master of Montana Mill.

Redgrave saw him arrive without a change of countenance, and a matter-of-fact greeting was exchanged. Then Stamford sat down and coolly, quietly observed:

"My daughter tells me that Brotherton was here last night."

"He was here," replied Redgrave.

"And you received him in this office."

"He came in, and I was here."

"He raved some, possibly."

"I should say he did."

"And upbraided you?"

"Of course."

"And argued with you?"

"Yes, if you may call threats argument."

Stamford's cold, keen eyes studied Redgrave's face persistently, but the latter was as much at ease as though the most ordinary subject was being discussed. Stamford was annoyed, but did not let the fact appear.

"I hope he did not seduce you from your allegiance to me, Mr. Redgrave?"

"I am not a weather-vane, Mr. Stamford. Having cast my fortunes with you, I am prepared to stand by your colors."

"You have decided wisely, and I am glad of it. You will find me a man inclined to help those who help me."

"And you will find me inclined to merit your aid."

The shadow of a smile moved Stamford's mouth. He had but little faith in Mr. Paul Redgrave. He had needed the man, had made a bid for his services and secured them, but he had no exalted opinion of him. He would stoop to use a traitor, but not to respect him.

There was a brief silence, and then a light step sounded at the door. Redgrave turned—there stood Lucia Brotherton.

A flush rose to the secretary's face; then it receded, leaving him equally pale. Lucia's gaze was upon him, and she spoke impetuously:

"Paul Redgrave, where is my father?"

The young man arose with grave politeness, but his voice was husky as he answered:

"I have not seen him to-day, Miss Brotherton."

"But last night—what of last night?"

"Last night?"

"That's what I said."

"I did not see him after leaving you and him together outside yonder door."

"Paul Redgrave, you lie!"

It was an expression no one had ever before heard from Lucia's lips; but she was in a mood of commingled anger and apprehension. That she was painfully excited her flushed face and trembling hands showed, and under other circumstances Paul would have been amazed. Now he seemed to hear only her fiery words, and noticed nothing.

His head dropped, and he slowly replied:

"I am sorry that you think so poorly of me."

"Oh! Judas, Judas! Prince of renegades! How well you play your part! But it will not avail you—the voice of the dead is calling your name, and I ask you—where is my father?"

"Miss Brotherton, surely you do not mean to imply that anything has happened to him?"

"I mean that you have murdered him!"

Redgrave recoiled.

"Murdered! If?" he almost gasped.

"You, traitor—you, ungrateful wretch. My father's blood cries from his unknown grave, and it names your name!"

One shapely arm Lucia outstretched, and the quivering index finger pointed full at Redgrave. He stood like one transfixed, leaning heavily on the hand which touched his desk.

Cephas Stamford quickly arose.

"Miss Brotherton, I hope the case is not so bad as this. Business is business, but I should be extremely sorry to hear that harm has befallen your father; so let me hope—"

"Are you sure you had no hand in the matter?" dramatically demanded the girl.

Stamford shrugged his shoulders and resumed his seat, smiling coldly.

"A mad woman! Insults, girl, will sometimes lose friends. You may fight your own battle."

"I will! Rest assured, I will; and if harm has come to my father, I will devote all my life to avenging his death. The guilty shall see whether I can fight my own battle!"

Redgrave suddenly strode forward and grasped her arm in a painful hold.

"Speak plain," he said, looking at her with contracted brows. "Give us no riddles, speak the truth!"

Even she felt the power of the somber look bent upon her, and she answered with surprising terseness:

"He left me last night at the door. I went home to await his coming, but fell asleep while watching. He did not come home; he has not come yet."

"Have you heard of him?"

"Not a word."

"Yet you charge me with *injuring* him!"

Lucia wrenched her arm from his hold.

"I have sent men to look in the river below the dam. I believe he tried to cross the foot-bridge and found you there; found you to his sorrow. There was murder in your heart last night; can you prove that murder was not done?"

"I am not here to prove it. You have made a charge against me which even common sense should revolt against. You do not even know that harm has come to Mr. Brotherton, yet you charge me with having committed the greatest crime known to man."

"He said there was murder in your heart."

"He wronged me then, as always."

"But he followed after you."

"What of it? I did not see him."

"Did you cross the foot-bridge?"

"Yes; I—"

Redgrave paused suddenly and seemed confused, a fact which did not escape Lucia's eyes. Just then, however, Stamford spoke abruptly:

"If you think harm has befallen him, go to work and settle the matter. You ought to have enough regard for decency not to go around making wild charges against an honest man. Brotherton is probably safe and sound as any of us."

"He would not have remained away all night if it had been so. He said he would come and he never broke his word."

Stamford arose with cold impatience.

"Let us have this thing settled. Come, Redgrave, we had better devote some time to this matter than to have a crazy woman talking wildly here. Let us go and investigate."

His cold sarcasm was not lost upon Lucia, but she made no reply. She had entered the office in a moment of excitement, and calmer judgment was asserting his rights. Harsh and bitter as was her judgment of Redgrave, there was something about his set, stern face which rather awed her. It did not give her a better opinion of him; his face was not prepossessing then.

Had he been formally accused of murder, and then worn that scowl, men would have said that the brand of villainy was on his face unmistakably.

Both men had donned their hats. Lucia preceded them from the door, and, as she stepped out, met a big, broad-shouldered man, who took off his hat to her with marked, if awkward politeness.

He was one of the old employees at Montana Mill, but was no longer such. When the place changed hands, he ceased to be an employee. He was the only one of the men who openly objected to the change, but he made objection enough for all.

His sympathies were strongly, boisterously in favor of Brotherton, and he gave his opinion of Stamford and Redgrave in terms anything but complimentary, winding up by declaring that he would never enter the mill again until Brotherton had regained his own.

On the present occasion he darted a hostile look at the other man, and then addressed Lucia:

"They're draggin' ther river, miss. Will you go thar? You might get in better comp'ny than now."

"I will go with you."

Lucia spoke quietly, and walked away beside her self-appointed champion without another look at the others. They followed more slowly.

"I think I shall have to hire some one to flog that fellow—that Lot Peterson," said Stamford, gazing at the big man with cold hostility.

"No one man in Bullion Bar will undertake the job if he knows Peterson," curtly replied Redgrave.

"I would do it myself, only that such work is beneath me."

The secretary did not answer. He knew Stamford would be no match for the muscular borderman, but it was not his affair, and he had more weighty matters to occupy his attention.

As they neared the river, it became evident that a vigorous search was being prosecuted. New-comers might be in possession of Montana Mill, but Lucia Brotherton had the sympathies of nearly every one, and the men of the Bar rallied promptly when she expressed the opinion that harm had come to her father.

Stamford and Redgrave had followed the other two persons to a point just below the fall, but so much slower that they were some minutes behind. When they reached that point, all things went to show that something unusual had happened.

Those who had been searching there had ceased work, and were collected in a silent group. All were looking toward the ground at a point around which they had circled, and the new-comers saw at a glance that there was something there which might well draw and hold attention.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VICTIM OF THE FALL.

A HUMAN form, with torn, dripping clothing which clung to it tightly; a face which was white where no bruise broke the dread pallor in a way even more dreadful. A dead man lay there in the middle of that gathering, and Paul Redgrave needed only one glance to know that a part, at least, of Lucia's suspicion was proven true.

Horace Brotherton was forever done with life!

The body had been found in the rough water below the fall, where it had caught among the rocks and been held fast, and had just been brought out. Lucia was on her knees beside it, caressing one cold hand and weeping bitterly.

Close beside her stood Lot Peterson, towering aloft like a lion at bay, prepared to defend the girl at all hazards. His gaze and that of nearly every one else was fixed upon Paul Redgrave, and not a glance was friendly.

The men knew of Lucia's previous charge, and though many were mill employees who would not offend the powers that were, all for the time

being looked at the secretary as at a convicted murderer.

Only one man seemed to enjoy the situation.

A little apart from the others stood Jake Sharkey, a smile on his face, his hands in his pockets, and evidently in very good spirits. He looked at Redgrave, and chuckled under his breath.

If Paul knew of these hostile glances he gave no sign. He was looking at the body like one in a dream. But Stamford pushed forward.

"Is it possible that Mr. Brotherton has met such an end?" he asked, trying to speak sympathetically.

"So you see," one man replied.

"Was it accidental?"

"Accidental?" echoed Lot Peterson, in a loud voice. "It was murder! That's it—murder has been done, and there is him who done it!"

He leveled one finger at Paul Redgrave, but the latter's set face did not change.

"You will be sorry for this, some day," he quickly said. "Show me proof first that Brotherton died by violence. When that is done—"

"Proof!" Lot echoed, again. "What proof do you expect to find? The man went over ther falls, an' that an' ther rapids has about churned him out o' all shape! Nobody says knife or bullet did it; what we do say is that he was pushed off ther foot-bridge. Now, who pushed him off?"

He was still looking straight at Redgrave, and Jake Sharkey smiled more broadly and shut one eye suggestively. He seemed very happy, but not a word spoke he. He had his secret, and he intended to keep it and make something out of it.

"You have made a serious charge here, Peterson," said Redgrave, in a very quiet manner. "I advise you to say no more until the coroner wants your opinion. I need scarcely say that I never harmed Horace Brotherton."

"They say blood 'll flow at ther touch o' a murderer," persisted Lot. "Dare you touch ther body?"

"Pshaw! you are too foolish to be listened to," impatiently answered the secretary. "Leave such ignorant ideas for the barbarous ages of the past."

"Oh! yes; that's all very fine!" scoffed Lot, who, honest man, was sure he had struck a lead. "But it won't go down hyar—no, sirree. I call on ye all fer witness that he won't touch ther body."

"This is rank nonsense," Stamford interrupted. "Your superstitious notion is absurd. Take up the body, men, and carry it—"

"Stop!"

Lucia Brotherton arose with this one word, and faced Stamford imperiously.

"I will take charge of my dead!" she tragically added. "I want to be sure that no one touches him whose hand is red with his blood. Lot, select honest men and have him carried home."

She turned her back upon the two objects of her wrath, and Stamford wheeled abruptly.

"I wash my hands of such folly," he curtly said. "Come, Redgrave!"

The secretary started to obey, but as he reached the outskirts of the crowd a hand was laid upon his arm.

He turned and saw Jake Sharkey. The honest boatman looked singularly pleasant for such an occasion, and he winked perceptibly as he observed:

"Yer Honor, it's all right."

"What's all right?"

"Oh! I'm fly! I were out in my boat last night, but I'm a fly cove, I be! I don't tell when nor whar I see you, Mr. Redgrave."

"Where did you see me?"

"Oh! don't ask me to say here; other ears might overhear, ye know."

Here the Black Shark winked vigorously again, but Redgrave uttered an impatient exclamation, turned and strode away. Then Mr. Sharkey winked again for his own amusement, thrust his hands deeper into his pockets and walked off.

"He's on, his honor is; an' you've struck a rich lead, Sharkey, old man. Ha! ha! no more hard work fur you. Blessed is he who shares ther secrets o' ther rich, fur thar is gold an' fine linen in it!"

In the meanwhile Lot Peterson was busy, and a litter was provided to convey the body to the Brotherton home. It went, still dripping with the river water, and only a part of the crowd remained. These few stood and discussed the matter, looking at the white foam made by the dashing of the water along the rocky stream, where the body was found, and up at the glittering fall.

Over there Horace Brotherton had fallen to his death, they believed. Few advanced the opinion that he had fallen accidentally. Nearly all believed that he had been thrown over by an enemy, and some, ignoring the lack of direct evidence, wondered why Paul Redgrave was not arrested.

It was a serious affair for Bullion Bar. The dead mill proprietor had been the making of the town, and had been its great man. Every workingman had owed him a debt of gratitude, and he had been popular. Now Montana Mill was in hostile hands, and Horace Brotherton was being

carried home for the last time—cold, lifeless, practically as poor as when he entered the world, and a violent death had closed all his future earthly chances.

It was a sad end—though quite in keeping with the vicissitudes of life—but the greatest amount of sympathy went out to Lucia.

So far as was known she was now alone in the world, and unless she could recover Montana Mill, she was nearly a beggar. As to the chances of recovery, she was one friendless girl against a shrewd, world-wise man.

"And Stamford won't show no favors," observed one of the group. "He's as cold-blooded as a turnip, an' he'll give nothin' he can hold. Redgrave will help him, too—cuss ther renegade!"

Humble friends in plenty had Lucia Brotherton, but she had forgotten all but her bereavement. Even that she bore with a sort of icy calmness. The violence and passion before shown were gone, and she said nothing more that was harsh.

Her innate gifts came to the front now, and she managed matters with a degree of coolness and system which surprised all. Some, indeed, went so far as to wonder if she was not rather indifferent in the face of the tragedy, but those who were more astute noticed little things which led them to think that the calm foreboded a storm.

When once Horace Brotherton was buried, argued these people, Lucia was liable to astonish all; she would then remember her threat to be avenged on all guilty parties, and keep her word to the letter.

Self-appointed detectives were very busy trying to learn how Brotherton had died. Everybody was compelled to listen to a certain series of questions. Had he seen the deceased near the foot-bridge the night before? Had any cry been heard?

All this went for nothing, however; nobody answered in the affirmative.

The story which Jake Sharkey might have told, was not told.

Stamford and Redgrave shut themselves into the office of Montana Mill, and remained invisible to all—a move which did not improve their reputation. True, they had taken a different course at first, and had met with rebuff and insult, but no allowance was made for this by their critics.

Matters progressed in a common-place way for two days, at the end of which time Horace Brotherton was buried. A coroner's jury had acted, but, try as they might, they had been able to find no evidence to justify any verdict but that of "accidental drowning."

Nothing went to show that the deceased had been pushed from the foot-bridge; evidence was even lacking to show that he had gone over the fall.

If Lucia was dissatisfied with this verdict, no one heard her say so.

By the time of the burial, Stamford had finished looking up the state of affairs at the mill—Redgrave knew every paper by heart—and he knew just what he had to fight for. That the fight was coming, he was soon shown.

Those who attended the funeral had barely reached home when Barlow, a Bullion Bar lawyer, visited Stamford and Redgrave in the office. Mr. Barlow was a man who never wasted words, and he tersely gave these points:

First, he was Lucia Brotherton's attorney.

Secondly, he proposed to place the Montana Mill case in court.

Thirdly, whoever was the rightly owner, Stamford was to be proceeded against for taking unceremonious possession. Barlow declared that the act came under the riot law, also that of breaking and entering, and he was free to admit that he had an irrefragable case.

Having menaced Stamford with these dangers, he took a folded paper from his pocket and extended it to Redgrave with the terse direction:

"Read!"

Redgrave opened the paper, but not a muscle of his face changed when he saw that it was a note from Lucia. He quickly read the following lines:

"MR. REDGRAVE:—Active hostilities are about to be commenced in the case of Montana Mill. I am ready to admit that I may have judged you rashly in certain ways, and I now ask if arrangements can be made whereby you will leave Stamford and return to your own position. I feel that it is a fact that you ought to throw your influence in favor of those to whom you owe your start in life. What may I expect?"

"LUCIA BROTHERTON."

Without the least hesitation Redgrave wrote on the margin of the note this off-hand reply:

"My duty plainly requires me to remain faithful to the real owner of Montana Mill, Mr. Stamford. Of course you would like the man who, of all men, knows the business best, but your motive necessarily must be selfish. Besides this, I see a trap. I must decline to enter it."

Folding the paper, he stoically returned it to the lawyer, and Lucia read the reply on the return of her agent.

Disappointment and scorn showed in her face, and she flung the missive down on the floor.

"Judas the Second, is wary," she cried, scornfully, "but he may yet find himself in trouble. Murder will out, and he shall pay the debt of blood. He prates about his duty! Oh! Judas, Judas, I knew your fair tongue long before I knew your black heart!"

CHAPTER VII.

REDGRAVE SPEAKS PLAINLY.

LEGAL proceedings to determine the ownership of Montana Mill were formally begun, and even Lucia Brotherton's lawyer was forced to acknowledge that the Stamford claim looked well on the surface.

It was briefly this:

Two men, Wells and Eames, had "staked" and worked the ground on which the mill stood in the days when Bullion Bar tried to be a mining-town of the first water. When they failed to strike pay-dirt, Eames had left. Then Horace Brotherton bought of him who remained, Wells, and supposed that he had a clear title.

On the other hand Stamford claimed that before Eames left he had bought Wells's share, and Stamford had then purchased all. According to his claim Wells had played a sharp game. He had only remained at the Bar to collect a few debts, and had imposed upon Brotherton and sold that to which he had no right.

Stamford had Eames to swear to what he said; Wells had disappeared completely. What story he would have told if there was uncertain, but it did look as though Brotherton had thrown away his money when he bought or was supposed to buy, the mill property.

It now became the one great hope of Lucia's lawyer to find Wells. He believed that Eames was lying, and wanted to prove it. Wells must be found. Barlow sent out word for him far and wide, and gave evidence of fighting Lucia's battle zealously.

He would be her only resource until her uncle, to whom she had telegraphed, could come on and lend his aid. This was Horace Brotherton's eldest brother, Rufus.

A detective of some reputation had been at work and endeavoring to prove that Brotherton's death had been murder, but he might as well have stayed away. Not only was he unable to find any evidence against Paul Redgrave, but, in the end, he went to Lucia's lawyer and gave the opinion that the deceased had fallen from the foot-bridge accidentally.

No one could safely walk it at night, and Brotherton had not been a young or active man.

The detective went away, but public opinion remained as strong as ever against Redgrave. Lot Peterson never let a chance pass to add fuel to the fire, and the taciturn secretary walked the streets only to be pointed out to strangers as a man suspected of murder on very good grounds.

Between him and Lucia no further communications passed, and if they met by chance she passed like one oblivious of his presence.

If he cared for this he gave no sign. He worked for Stamford with the patient, outwardly-faithful manner he had always shown, and as the mill started on work again by mutual consent of the rival claimants, he had enough to do.

A week passed uneventfully, in one sense of the word, and then Lucia received a letter which roused her from the apathy into which she seemed to have fallen. She read it with more than ordinary interest, and with emotion. A second time she perused it; then she sent for Peterson. He came, and she directed him to go for her lawyer. He started, and she called him back, and not only told him not to do her errand, but to forget it.

Plainly her mind was in an unsettled and perturbed state.

Half an hour she remained alone, and then she seemingly arrived at a decision. She sat down and wrote two notes, which she sent away by a trusty messenger. All this while her composure had been perfect, but there was something which indicated that it was an unnatural calmness, and when her messenger was gone she arose and began pacing the room with quick, nervous steps.

"The die is cast," she said, audibly. "I don't know whether I have done right, but I will confront them and see how they meet my charges. Perhaps Judas the Second will not be quite so stoical then."

Her manner was that of one who anticipated triumph, but no one would have wagered much on her as a possible winner. Her nervous movements, and the constant clasping and unclasping of her hands showed how she was beset with emotions she could but poorly control.

Shortly after dark she left the house and went to that of another of the leading citizens of the Bar.

She was not the only person astir. Fifteen minutes later a man approached the house, knocked, was admitted, and conducted to the main room. It was Paul Redgrave, but he had come in utter ignorance of the fact that anything of importance was afoot.

He sat down, and was left to wait alone for some time. A book enabled him to make a show of entertaining himself, but he often paused and looked away at vacancy with the air of one whose mind is on other subjects.

Finally the door opened, and he rose with an air of relief. Then he started back with surprise. Lucia stood before him.

His face grew more somber, but he stood looking at her in silence until she spoke.

"You did not expect to see me," she spoke, quietly.

"No, I did not."

"Nor did you wish to see me."

"Very true."

"So you can still tell the truth if occasion demands."

He made a quick, sharp gesture.

"Have you merely come here to insult me?"

"More," Lucia coolly answered. "Insults would fall on your armor like feathers on a rock. No, I have more to say than you suspect, and—"

She was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come!" she evenly added.

The door opened and a young woman entered, and then Lucia flashed a quick glance from one to the other. Redgrave had flushed, and he seemed far from calm; but the new-comer showed no emotion except anger and scorn. She it was who had made her appearance that night in the mill office, just before Horace Brotherton went out to his death, and she had no reason to admire Lucia Brotherton.

"Alicia, daughter of Cephas Stamford," said Lucia, looking mockingly at Redgrave. "You know her, I think?"

"What miserable jest is all this?" indignantly demanded Alicia. "Why have I been decoyed here to meet with insult?"

"So you, too, talk of insult?" and Lucia looked the scorn she felt.

"I certainly will not bear it—I will go."

So saying Alicia swept toward the door, but Miss Brotherton barred her way.

"Wait!" she directed. "You need have no fear that I will wrong you. Whatever others may do at Bullion Bar, I shall not forget my self-respect. What I ask of you—both of you—is that you listen; nothing more."

Alice glanced curiously, doubtfully at Redgrave. She did not know whether he was with, or against, her, and she really feared Lucia. Stamford's daughter was tall of stature, proud and imperious, but there was an air of reserved power about the smaller woman which awed and disturbed Alicia.

Instinctively she felt that they were enemies, and that she would be a loser in any clash between them.

In reply to her glance Redgrave nodded and motioned to a chair.

"Miss Brotherton has something to say, I judge," he gravely observed. "We may as well listen."

Lucia smiled coldly as Alicia flounced into a chair, and then glanced from one to the other in momentary silence. There was a time when people had believed Miss Brotherton incapable of anything approaching harshness, but trouble hardens the nerves and the heart, and her latent powers were standing her in good use.

"I have brought you two together to talk with you," Lucia quietly said. "I used an artifice to get you here, disguising my writing and signing another's name, but it was merely done to accomplish what is already done. Now you are here, you shall hear what I have to say."

"Do, for Heaven's sake, say it, then!" cried Alicia, impatiently, superciliously.

"Have no fear but that I will speak soon enough!"

"Speak—and then let me choose my own company."

"What if it should be that of murderers?"

Lucia asked the question looking straight at Alicia. Was it fancy, or did the latter grow pale? Lucia could not tell, for her enemy had moved where a shadow fell on her scornful face, but her voice was hardly calm as she echoed:

"Of murderers?"

"That is what I said."

"You use strange language."

"I know to whom I am talking."

"Possibly you do not. I am only a woman, like yourself, but I tell you, miss, that I am not to be insulted with impunity. Unless it is stopped I will at once leave here. Mr. Redgrave, let me ask if you are a party to this outrage?"

"I am not," he answered, his strong face giving no clew to his thoughts. "I have no idea why we have been called here, but I would suggest that Miss Brotherton inform us at once. She can hardly expect us to sit here and listen to such unpleasant, yet vague talk."

"I will speak as plainly as you can wish, and I will prove that I knew what I was talking about when I spoke to Miss Alicia Stamford. I would like to ask her where she was the night of my father's death."

"That is my business," Alicia retorted.

"It may become the law's."

"Do you threaten me?"

"Not at all; I ask for a candid answer."

"Be careful not to threaten, for, by my life, I would not hesitate to—"

"To do what?"

Calmly came Lucia's question after the fierce speech of her enemy was ended so abruptly, but

Alicia did not reply. She sat back in her chair, her eyes glittering and her face pale. Redgrave moved uneasily in his chair, but said nothing.

"If you want to know what I have to say—listen!" abruptly added Lucia. "I have news that you two were walking along the river-bank near the dam, the night my father died. You were waiting for some one to come—a man of whom you both spoke bitterly; and only waiting for him to come that you might do him harm."

Redgrave made an impatient gesture.

"What mad fancy is this?" he demanded.

"It is no fancy at all. It seems that when you left the mill that night you went direct to Miss Stamford. Whether there was a previous engagement I don't know. Now, I ask you whom you were waiting for, and what harm you did him when he came?"

"'Tis all a lie!" declared Alicia. "I was not there at all. You can't connect me with your romance."

"Nor me," Redgrave added, his brows drawn together in a scowl.

"You deny it in vain, and I will prove the fact if you remain obstinate. I have all along said that my father met his death at the hands of certain enemies. Let me tell the story of what I know, and your arrest will at once follow."

"Empty words," coldly replied Redgrave. "If you had a clew worth repeating you would not come here to tell it. The blow comes before the word when the blow is likely to be of service. For my own part I can afford to laugh at your threats; I only ask justice for this lady."

"The fair Alicia! Well, she shall have justice—all the law can give her. Then you will have a chance to show how tender you can be to her. I will have her arrested, and you may go."

"If you fight her, you also fight me," the secretary somberly replied. "Make war on us, if you wish, but one thing you may as well know: Alicia Stamford is my promised wife, and I shall fight her battles against you and all others."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CABIN GIRL'S UNSPOKEN SECRET.

REDGRAVE'S announcement was strangely made and strangely received. His manner was far from being that of a man who announces a pleasant fact; if he had revealed a death, instead of a marriage engagement, it would have been more appropriate.

Alicia and Lucia heard with evident surprise, if signs were reliable, but while the former's face flushed with joy, Miss Brotherton grew pale and sat staring at Redgrave in dismayed silence.

An observer would have said that both these fair women loved the secretary, and that when he raised one to the pinnacle of triumph the other was dashed with her hopes to the dust.

"You would have the truth," said he, looking at the floor with his most somber expression, and apparently unconscious of all their faces expressed. "Well, so be it; you know all now. Alicia Stamford and I are to marry."

"Oh! Judas, the second!" cried Lucia, with a desperate effort to be brave, yet with something in her voice almost a sob; "was it for this you sold yourself and your honor?—for this that you turned renegade?"

"We were walking by the dam," he went on, unheeding her words, and speaking as somberly as ever, "but I defy you to prove evil of us. We walked there—what of it? Had we not a right—as engaged lovers?"

Lucia's face grew hard.

"There is something still unexplained. As you walked there you spoke of an 'obstacle,' and said that it must be 'removed.' What did that mean?"

Redgrave's gaze was suddenly lifted.

"I deny it," he said, emphatically. "No such words were used, and I defy you to prove it. Where is your witness? Who is he?"

"He will appear in good time."

"I doubt it. I told you before that you were playing a bluff game, and I say so now. You would never have come to us as you have if you had felt sure of your case. You either have one so weak that you dare not trust it to law, or you have none at all."

"I have a letter which asserts all that I say."

"From whom?"

"I must decline to say."

"The man dare not face me—ha! perhaps he was an anonymous writer."

His eyes surveyed Lucia's face keenly, and as she seemed unable to reply he again broke the silence:

"So, I have surmised it. And are you building air-castles on the word of a man too cowardly to sign his own name? No wonder you dared not take your case to law."

Still Lucia made no reply; she was confused and disheartened. Redgrave had guessed the truth, and she saw the revelation of which she had hoped so much torn to pieces and left as nothing. If there was a shadow of value to it she failed to see it then.

She was, however, not in condition to reason calmly; it was only with an effort that she maintained as much outward calmness as she showed. The news she had come to tell amounted to but little now; what she had heard was all of which she could think.

Alicia's mocking face was before her like a whip of thorns; her smile of triumph was worse to Lucia than anything else. She forgot all else then.

"I wish you joy," she said, in a hard voice, and entirely forgetting the point at issue. "I have no more to say to you. As you say, lovers have a right to walk, and no harm can be expected of lovers like you. I wish you joy, and have no doubt that you will find yourselves well mated."

She arose, and Alicia's smile broadened. She knew to what this sudden abandonment of the real case was to be ascribed, and she had a dim idea how the blow struck to Lucia's heart.

Alicia was a woman of ice and fire; of love and hate. With her there was no middle course, and, having reason to fear Lucia, she hated her bitterly.

Now she was utterly demoralized, and Alicia rejoiced accordingly.

She shot a glance at Redgrave, longing to taunt her unlucky rival, but the expression on his somber face checked her. He had not the air of a happy man, and she was wise enough to shun the breakers.

Lucia paused for no ceremony. She felt oppressed, like one lacking enough air to breathe, and she longed to be alone, free from that house and such company.

She went abruptly, and soon stood under the open sky, but it brought little relief. Heaven and earth alike seemed cold and hostile then; her heart seemed bursting, and she hurried away like a guilty creature.

"Let them go on!" she thought, bitterly. "I want nothing to do with either. If Paul Redgrave can care for such a woman as she, then I want to see him no more. This is the punishment of my sin, and I will bear the burden. The burden! It is no loss to me—I am glad it is so. Yet—ah! I will fight all the harder for Montana Mill, and if I can win they may not feel so exultant."

She had been hurrying homeward, but her flight was suddenly interrupted.

Some one stepped directly in front of her; a woman, like herself, yet one she did not recognize.

The interruption annoyed her, and she turned aside to pass, but once more her way was blocked.

"Hold on!" said the stranger. "I've got a word to say to you."

"Who are you?"

"What does that matter?"

"Nothing. Let me go."

"Stop! I'll tell you who I am. I would before, only I thought it might not please your dainty ears. I'm Bess Sharkey."

"Bess Sharkey!"

"Yes. Ever hear of me?"

"I think so."

"You never heard any good, I'll say it, but that ain't to the point. As I said, I want to speak with you—"

"You must excuse me," said Lucia, impatiently, for she saw no way in which good could come of talking with the Black Shark's daughter. "I am in too great a hurry to talk now. If you want money—here!"

As she spoke she thrust her purse into Bess's hand, and then passed and hurried away.

Bess looked at the purse and then after Lucia; then a red flush overspread her face and her eyes glittered with anger. With a swift movement she flung the offensive gift after the innocent offender, and, without pausing to see the result, wheeled and hurried away.

"She insulted me, like all the rest!" the girl panted, her fingers working convulsively. "They all know me, and use me the same way. I'm Jake Sharkey's girl, and I ain't good enough for them to speak to. So be it, my fine lady; I scorn you and your money, and I'll see you in purgatory before I try to help you again."

Muttering thus she hurried along until the foot-bridge was reached. The night was as dark as when Horace Brotherton went to his death, but she almost ran across the bridge.

She would not have cared if she fell. Dissatisfied and moody at all times, she was now stirred to the quick by what she deemed a great insult.

Lucia had meant well in offering the money, but to the over-sensitive mind of Sharkey's girl her motive had seemed anything else.

Straight on Bess went, and in a short time her wretched home was reached. Sharkey was out, and she turned on the lowered blaze of the lamp and flung herself into a chair viciously.

"That's the first time I ever tried to do anybody any good," she morosely muttered, "and it'll be the last. I ain't going to have any fine folks put on airs over me! I ain't fit for them to look at; but they needn't do it. I can get along without them—yet I'd just like to pay that proud upstart off in her own coin!"

She sat with her eyes twinkling evilly, but the current of her thoughts was interrupted by

a rap at the door. Without raising her head she called out:

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Lucia Brotherton stood on the threshold.

There was a pause, during which Bess looked at the uninvited visitor with a surprised scowl, while Lucia glanced uneasily about. She knew the reputation of the Black Shark, and believed she was putting her life in jeopardy by venturing there. Her gaze finally settled upon Bess, but instead of the encouragement she wished, she received only a stony glare in return.

"I beg your pardon," she faltered, "but I hope I did not offend you in the village?"

Bess laughed shortly, unmusically.

"Offend me! Great Heavens, what right has a miserable wolf like me to be offended at what you do? Ain't you one of the grand and lofty? Oh, yes; and I ought to feel proud if you ask me to lace the shoe on your patrician foot, I s'pose."

"My dear girl," expostulated Lucia, "you have no cause to feel like this. I did not intend to offend you. I—I was merely thinking of other matters—"

"Go and think of them some more."

"But I want to hear what you had to say."

"You can't; it's too late now."

Curtly enough was the retort, and Bess began to feel some interest. She had a chance to punish this fine lady who had scorned her, as she thought.

"If I can help you—"

"You can't and you sha'n't!" Bess declared. "Put a pin in that, and don't forget it. Help me? I'm able to help myself—well, rather! I can fight my own battles, against poor or rich. I hate 'em all!"

She scowled even more belligerently at the visitor, but Lucia would not be rebuffed.

"It is I who want help," she said, steadily.

"It has occurred to me that you came to me to tell me something of importance, but in my haste I neglected to hear it. Now I beg your pardon, and ask you to say what you then wished."

Bess laughed unpleasantly.

"Thank the Lord for the chance I've got!" she mocked. "I never got square quicker before. Tell you? Not much! I *did* have something to say, but I won't tell it now. Not much. I just like to get square with such birds of paradise as you. You'd give a pile—even half of Montana Mill—to know; but torture couldn't wring it from me."

"Bessie, this is—"

"Soft soap! Don't Bessie me."

"Well, this is folly."

"It's revenge!"

"You should not harbor such thoughts—"

"Oh! yes, that's nice and pretty. I've seen those of *your* stripe before. Give a man or woman good-luck and a pocket full of money, and, oh my! how they *can* preach good will and all the extras, and give the golden rule and corn-husks to poor wretches like me. Oh! I know *your* sort, and I just hate you. There!"

Lucia recoiled a moment from this storm of words, but it was in keeping with Bess Sharkey's reputation, and she soon rallied.

"Let this part pass. I'll pay to hear what you know."

"About what?" and a cunning gleam showed in the cabin girl's eye.

"Was it about the *murder*?"

"Murder!" echoed Bess, starting.

"Yes; the murder of Horace Brotherton. Tell me what you know."

The last word was followed by a startled cry from the speaker. A hand had fiercely grasped her arm, and she turned to see Jake Sharkey's coarse, evil face and glittering eyes.

"I'll tell ye all ye want to know!" he hissed.

"Cuss ye fur a prowlin' cat, I'll talk ter you, an' talk red-hot business, you bet!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DEFIANCE.

LUCIA recoiled from this fierce outburst. She had known the Black Shark by reputation, but the evil things whispered concerning him had seemed only a dream until she thought of coming to the house. Then she trembled, but, conquering her weakness, had not fully understood what she was daring until she saw the man glaring at her thus.

There was murder in his eyes—of that she felt sure, and she would have made an effort to flee had not all strength apparently deserted her limbs.

Sharkey shook her as a cat would a mouse.

"Wal, whar's yer tongue?" he demanded.

"Why don't ye talk up?"

"I—I don't know," Lucia faltered.

"Don't, eh? Wal, I'll try ter help an idee inter yer head. You've come mousin' 'round hyar fur p'int, an' I'm ther chance-cleer ter help ye out. Wot d'ye want ter know?"

His manner was rough and bullying, but Lucia's courage suddenly returned.

"First of all, I want you to let go of my arm," she said, wrenching that member free.

"You do? Bless your sweet heart, why didn't ye say so afore? I s'posed you jest doted on havin' me s'port ye. Wal, what next?"

"Next, I'll thank you to let me pass."

"Oho! Wanter leave ther house, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, when you hev explained why you come hyar you kin go, not afore."

"I did not come to see you; further than that, it is none of your business."

Lucia's courage was growing every moment, and this bold reply, and her equally bold manner, dumfounded the boatman. His bullying manner suddenly vanished, and he remembered that he was showing his true colors for once. This alarmed him, but even then he could not forget the conversation he had interrupted. He looked suspiciously from Lucia to Bess and back again.

"Somebody cter explain," he persisted.

"I decline," Lucia answered.

"You were speakin' about—"

"My father's murder. Yes. What do you know about it?"

"Nothin'; upon my soul, nothin'!" Sharkey hastily declared. "Girl, why did you come hyar?"

Lucia flashed a glance at Bess, but the latter was apparently as indifferent and sullen as ever. The visitor steadily answered:

"I have no explanation to make, and, once more, I must ask free passage. Will you stand aside?"

The Black Shark hesitated, and then took off his battered hat with cringing politeness, or what he intended for a show of politeness:

"Mum, fur be it from me ter hinder ye. I was skeered by sech talk as I heard, or you never would have had any trouble. I'm poor, mum, but I'm honest, an' fur be it from me ter merlest ye. Gofreely, an' ef ye ever want a good friend an' servint, remember honest Jake Sharkey is hyar. Good-night, mum!"

The last words were spoken as Lucia passed through the door, and she went with a feeling of great relief. As outwardly humble as Sharkey had suddenly become, she saw the ill-concealed devil in his eyes, and a stout defender would have made her feel far safer than all Jake's groveling protestations.

Still, she was not molested, and, with a significant glance at Bess, she flashed out of the door and was gone. Sharkey went to the threshold, listened until her footsteps ceased to sound, and then closed the door and turned toward Bess.

She knew what she had to expect, but even when his lips parted in a wolfish smile more dangerous than a frown—she knew his ways well—not a shadow of fear disturbed her cool indifference.

"Well?"

"Well?"

The first question from Sharkey, deep, threatening and ugly; the second from Bess, as indifferent as ever.

"Well?" he snarled, "don't set there an' talk like a parrot. I want an explanation. Why ther fiends was that she-cat hyar?"

"I don't know. You asked her; she didn't say."

"You lie! You *do* know."

"Well, if you're so mighty wise, why did you ask me at all? Answer your own questions after this."

"I'm tellin' *you* ter answer, an', by Satan, you're goin' ter do it. D'ye hear? I ain't goin' ter hev no back talk, either. Understand?"

"Rubbish! You've tried to scare me before, and ought to remember how you came out. Drop it!"

"I won't drop it. I've gi'n you too much rope altogether, an' it's time ter bring you up with a short turn. Hyar I come home and find the Brotherton gal hyar, an' you two talkin' about ther old chap's defunct. What am I ter understand by that?"

"Give it up, but it strikes me you're mighty sensitive on the subject. Did you kill old Brotherton?"

The Black Shark started.

"Curse you, how dare ye say that?" he exclaimed, harshly. "Walls have ears; never breathe a word o' this ag'in. No, I didn't kill him, nor help, nor do I know nothin' about it; but, what I'm askin' you is, why was you an' that she-cat talkin' 'bout ther matter?"

"That's our business," Bess curtly replied.

"By ther fiends, I'll make it *my* business, too! I'm goin' ter have a straight answer, or—"

As he spoke Sharkey had moved forward until within two feet of the girl; then out came his ever ready knife. He flashed it before her eyes and ended the sentence with a suggestive gesture, but Bess met his angry gaze without a change of countenance.

"You're wasting breath," she tersely said.

"Gal, I've had enough of back talk. Will you answer?"

"No; I won't!"

"Curse ye, you will, or I'll give ye this blade!" and he waved the knife again.

Bess arose and, never retreating a step, faced him with unwavering coolness.

"Strike as soon as you please," she said. "If you imagine that death has more terrors than life for me, you are mightily mistaken. Strike, for no one will mourn for Jake Sharkey's outcast girl. Strike, and end my misery. Strike—if you dare!"

Holding her hands well down she looked boldly into his face and awaited the stroke. Not a muscle trembled; she felt all that her words implied, and actually courted the violent release from life.

But the Black Shark's hand dropped, and he growled a curse.

"You're altogether too willin'," he added.

"Why shouldn't I be willing? What have I to live for? My life is what you have made it, and it's not worth living. Why do you hesitate? You have your knife ready—now use it. 'Twould be no new work for you."

"Gal, what do you—what *dare* you mean?" demanded Sharkey, actually trembling.

"Don't ask me to tell all. I can look back over the years and see enough which I *suspect* to make a black record. Thank Heaven I know nothing positively."

"I never did harm to no human, an' ef—"

"Where is the young man who came here the night Horace Brotherton died? Where is Bradlock?"

"How should I know?" surily growled the man.

"You do know, but perhaps it is a story you would not care to tell. He went out with you, not knowing you as I did—and never come back. Stop!—deny nothing. That night I crept down-stairs, hoping to find the paper you forcibly took from me, and I heard you mutter in your sleep."

"Mo?"

"You! And ef what do you suppose you muttered? Of a quarrel, a struggle, a blow, and of huring a man over some high—probably a precipice—and you spoke the name of Bradlock. 'He will never come back,' you said. *Now* do you think I know you and your way?"

"You know too much," snarled Sharkey, wolfish.

"Ay, too much for your safety, so raise your knife again and—*strike*! Don't be backward; you'll be hung some day, anyhow; why not die in a glory of crime?"

Still fearless she stood before him with her bosom unguarded against the blow she defied, but it was not a heroic picture. It was the expression of despair; she coveted release from a life which had been made a burden to her by the atmosphere in which she had lived; and there was only something inexpressibly mournful in her sullen recklessness.

Sharkey raised the knife, looked toward where he knew her heart was fiercely beating, then raised his gaze to her face.

One moment he looked there, then muttered a curse, hurled the knife away, wheeled abruptly, went to a chair and sat down.

The knife, sticking point first in the wall, remained quivering for several seconds, and then remained like a mute witness of what had almost been a crime, but the Black Shark, biting his nails and glowering at the floor, never looked up.

Bess remained looking at him in silence for several moments; then she resumed her seat with the same indifference which had marked her defiance.

He was in a particularly ugly mood, for her rebellion, as he considered it, troubled him. Before, she had seemed a safe companion. True, he never confided in her, but he had not feared that she would betray him in any way.

Now, he trusted her no longer.

He was afraid of her, but dared not remove her as he had done other enemies. There was something—he could not have told what—which stopped his hand and made him helpless.

Several minutes he sat glowering at the floor; then, without a word, without a glance at her, he arose and slouched out of the house.

The cool open air seemed to clear his head somewhat, and he walked on toward the dam. If, however, he thought more clearly, it was not with any pleasure. He was afraid of Bess, and knew not how soon she might see fit to strike him.

With an effort he turned his mind in other channels and, remembering Lucia Brotherton, was seized with a strong desire to see her again and undo what mischief he might have done.

Crossing the foot-bridge he started along in the course he supposed she must have taken, but only a little further had he gone when he came face to face with another man. Both paused but the other would have turned aside and gone on had not Sharkey spoken quickly:

"Mr. Redgrave—one word with ye."

The secretary, for it was he, looked up impatiently. He had been walking with lowered head, in deep thought, and the interruption did not please him.

"I am busy, busy," he said, curtly.

"Doin' what?"

"No matter."

"You'll s'cuse me," Sharkey said, doggedly, "but I hev a word ter say ter you. You'd better hear it."

"I had? What do you mean? Am to understand that you threaten me?"

"Bless yer heart no; I'm an honest, peaceable man, who wouldn't threaten nobody, but yer see I hev a friendly word ter say. 'Tis about ther night Horace Brotherton so peculiarly slipped off ther foot-bridge."

Redgrave started, turned fully toward the boatman and looked him in the face. He seemed to think no more about leaving, but his voice was not exactly calm as he asked:

"What about that night?"

"Oh! nothin' much; leastways, it need only int'rest we two. Ye see, pard, I was abroad that same eve, an' I seen you. A word ter ther wise is sufficient, they say, an' I reckon you hitch on. How is it, old man?"

CHAPTER X.

GOOD LUCK AND BAD FOR SHARKEY.

THE night was too dark for Sharkey to discover what expression was on the secretary's face, but the latter's manner was certainly peculiar. He stood and stared at the Black Shark in silence until the pause became painful to the elder man.

"Wal, I s'pose you heerd me?" he suggested.

"I did," Redgrave answered, in a slightly husky voice. "You spoke of—of—"

"That night. Jes' so—an' how I see'd you. Jes' so!"

"Where were you?"

"Nigh ther dam."

Redgrave drew a deep breath and brushed his hand across his face.

"Why do you tell me this?" he asked.

"Wal, I thought 'twas proper you should know w'ot I knew. I happened onter this little thing—which I don't think o' much a'count, though thar be them that would make a great hurrah over it—an' I thought I'd come ter you sort o' friendly an' let yer know that I see'd ther whole business. See?"

"Yes."

"But, bless yer, I ain't hyar as an enemy; not by a durned sight. That ain't my way; ask anybody an' they will tell ye that Jake Sharkey minds his own biz like a little man. I kin keep a secret, too."

"I think I understand," Redgrave answered, still looking steadily at the boatman. "You are not averse to making an honest dollar by keeping your mouth shut."

"Now you hit it plum'-center," Sharkey replied.

"How many paymasters do you want?"

"Eh?"

"Possibly, having made terms with me, you would also go to her, and—"

"Not by a blamed sight. I don't fancy her—a proud, disdainful thing, who travels on her gold and turns up her nose at poor folks. None o' her in mine, pard. No, sir-ree. When you make terms with me, you kin depend on me ev'ry blessed time. Jake Sharkey may be poor and lowly, but he's honest and true."

The Black Shark expanded his broad chest, and seemed to believe all he said.

"How much do you want?" Redgrave asked.

"S'pose I say a hund'ed a month?"

"Too much, by far," was the business-like reply.

"But jest think how serious a matter—"

"A mere trifle, which I'd almost as soon dare as not. Put my neck in the noose, and I swear I won't pull it out."

Honest Sharkey held up his hands in horror. Here was another person who held life as a trifle. Somehow, Redgrave reminded him of Bess, and if he was equally obstinate, it would do no good to argue with him.

"I'll give fifty a month," the secretary added decisively.

"Only fifty! Why, that's a mere cipher, an' I reckon ther gal would pay me more."

"Go to her, then."

Redgrave turned impatiently away, but Sharkey caught his arm.

"No, no!" he expostulated. "Hold on. I'll pay ther fiddler an' dance—or you may—that is—it's a bargain."

"So be it. You shall be regularly paid, only see to it that you keep the secret. If you put my head in a noose, I'll find some way to make you sweat."

"Now don't you worry, old man; I'll be true blue. I know too much ter kill ther goose that lays ther golden egg, you bet."

Sharkey spoke emphatically, and Redgrave seemed to be convinced; at any rate he dropped the subject and made arrangements for the monthly payment in a straightforward, business-like way. This done, he showed a desire to get rid of his present company, and walked rapidly away.

The boatman looked after him and chuckled. "There's a good piece of work well done, Sharkey, old chap," he commented. "Ther duke come ter time prettier than I s'posed he would, an' I hooked him like a Cape Cod fisherman. Aha! thar won't be nobody hung fur killin' old Brotherton while I git my salary—my salary, I say!"

Toward home turned the Black Shark, but his serenity was somewhat disturbed by thoughts of the late visitor at his cabin. If Lucia Brotherton had a clew to the fact that he saw her father pushed from the foot-bridge, and her conversation with Bess seemed to indicate it, he would yet find his bargain with Redgrave a barren one.

"But jest let that she-cat kick over my dish an' I'll make it hot fur her!" he muttered, feel-

ing that Lucia was very unjust to him. "Paul is a right decent feller, an' him an' me will get along right friendly ef she don't interfere. Ef she does, let her look out."

By this time he was half way across the foot-bridge. He was moving along freely when something—it was not a sound, for the roar of the fall drowned all else—told him some one was behind him.

A feeling akin to fear swept over the big boatman, and he stopped, turned, and looked back. No one was visible, but his feeling that danger was near did not abate. He drew his knife and took a step in the direction from which he had just come.

The darkness defied even his sharp eyes, and he could not tell whether he was alone on the bridge, but he intended to know.

With a step as quick as was safe he moved along the narrow way, always looking ahead. If he had covered more ground with his eyes he might have discovered more, for it was a fact that as he went a man was at one place hanging from the bridge, and as he passed the man agilely squirmed back to the level and then ran across to the north side.

Unconscious of all this, Sharkey went on and reached the south bank without adventure.

"Strange," he muttered. "Nobody's hyar, yet I could a'most hev sworn there was. Dunno why I thought so, but I felt it in my bones. But ef thar was, he's gone now."

He looked along the bank for a moment, feeling very much dissatisfied, but, knowing the futility of making a search, turned back and recrossed the foot-bridge. This time he had no presentiment that any one was near, but half-way over, he stopped and looked over the fall.

It was at that point he had seen Brotherton hurled to his death, and the place had an attraction for him. He felt great admiration for Paul Redgrave when he remembered how effectually one of the claimants of Montana Mill had been disposed of.

When he reached the north bank he turned homeward and went on briskly.

His way lay among the rocks so plentiful there, but the way was too well known to need attention. Unfortunately for him, he had forgotten his late presentiment of danger.

Danger was near, however, and it came abruptly. Strong arms seized him, and, before he could make a movement toward resistance, he was flung to the ground.

He bounded like a snared animal. A long life of adventure had made him an adept at fighting, and he whirled about like a gladiator.

Some one was trying to kneel upon him, but the effort was a failure. Sharkey was strong, and seeing, as he believed, that his life was in danger, he put forth every effort. The unknown could not maintain his advantage, and in a moment more the two were grappled in more equal fight, though Sharkey was still at the bottom.

The boatman had an element of cowardice in his nature, and though he could act the bully and bravo well when circumstances permitted, he was now alarmed at finding himself menaced by a danger he could not understand. This, however, gave desperation to his efforts, and he fought in tiger fashion.

It was a desperate battle there in the shadow of the rocks, and all the more so to Sharkey, because his adversary never spoke a word. The boatman growled, cursed and threatened, but not a word answered the unknown.

What manner of man was he, and why had he made the attack?

The two seemed well matched, and they whirled about without either succeeding in getting a lasting advantage. Now and then one would gain the top, but he was soon displaced, and then the struggle went on.

Sharkey began to feel alarmed. He knew his own powers well, and had seldom seen them fail him, but this stranger seemed to have muscles of iron. He was a hard man to beat. The boatman would have used his knife to end the affair, but when he felt for it, he felt in vain.

It had evidently dropped from his belt at the beginning of the fight.

His strength began to fail him, too, and terror seized upon him. If his enemy meant murder, the opportunity might soon be his. The Black Shark uttered a cry for help—only one. A strong hand promptly encircled his neck, and he called no more. That same strong hand thrust him back, and then he felt a sensation as though his head had been cracked open. He had been driven against a rock, and it almost knocked consciousness from his body. Then his own hold relaxed and he lay limply, barely conscious and incapable of fighting.

As the unknown realized this he uttered a faint exclamation of satisfaction and arose to his knees.

One moment he glanced quickly about to make sure that Sharkey's cry had not drawn unwelcome comers to the place, and then he plunged his hand into the prostrate man's pocket.

Sharkey lay perfectly still. He knew what was transpiring, and was perfectly satisfied while there was no change in the situation. He had nothing worth stealing, as the stranger would soon discover, and he was willing to be searched.

He tried to see who his enemy was, but once more the darkness was against him. He had thought that it might be Redgrave, grown tired of the compact just made, but this idea he knew now was incorrect.

Who was this man, and what in the name of all that was mysterious did he expect to find on the person of the Black Shark?

He expected something, and searched for it diligently. Every pocket and corner was searched, and a pin could scarcely have escaped that investigation, but in the end he stopped and muttered something indicative of disappointment. He had failed completely.

Several seconds passed before he stirred further; then he bent and peered in Sharkey's face. That honest man never feigned anything more earnestly than he feigned unconsciousness then; he was terribly afraid that the unknown would wind up his work by a knife-thrust.

Nothing of the kind occurred. The unknown seemed to be satisfied, for he abruptly arose, looked warily about and then retreated toward the dam with quick steps.

No sooner was he out of sight than Sharkey's courage came oozing back. He had no desire to fight the man, but did want to learn who he was. He determined to make an effort to do this.

Arising, he glided along in pursuit, skulking through the rocks like a hungry wolf, and just as he neared the dam he saw some one move out upon the foot-bridge—the unknown, of course.

Cautiously Jake followed. The pursued went straight ahead, and the Black Shark followed, stepping lightly upon the bridge. All went well until he was half-way across, and there was no sign to indicate that anything was wrong, but more trouble was in store for Sharkey.

A sharp voice suddenly sounded in advance.

"Halt, there!"

Sharkey obeyed promptly, and in alarm.

"Sit down on the bridge!"

Sharkey's hair seemed to rise. Sit down on the bridge! It was all he felt able to do to keep his balance as he was. He might fall in trying to obey.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear!" Sharkey admitted, lugubriously.

"Then obey, or I'll put seven or eight slugs into you. Here I am, on solid ground, and I command the bridge. If I fire I can sweep the whole thing clean, and you will go over the dam. How is it—will you sit down?"

The boatman groaned. He dared neither advance nor retreat, and as there was no other way for him to do, he had to obey. Cautiously he slid down, and then sat astride the bridge, hanging on with both hands.

"That's horse sense, and I begin to admire you. Do you like your place?"

"No," Jake frankly admitted.

"You'll get into a worse box than that one of these days. You're an infernal rascal, Jake, and you're fishing in deep waters. You'll come to grief. Do you hear?"

"Yes."

"Some day you'll be hung by the neck. Just now you are hanging on the ragged edge. It would be a mercy to the world if I gave you a shot and wound up your career forever, but I'm not a butcher; I don't kill men in cold blood. Some day I may have to kill you if the hangman don't hurry up."

"I ain't done anybody harm," Sharkey protested, with more spirit.

"You've tried mighty hard, and you'll reap what you've sowed one of these days. There are those in Bullion Bar who are laying up a stock of wrath to come which will make a lively time by and by. Jake, you may yet have to account for certain missing parties. Where is Meg Warner, and where is Bradlock?"

The Black Shark seemed to grow cold, and his arms were certainly weaker than usual. These questions had a terrible significance to him.

"Why don't you speak up?" sharply demanded the invisible unknown.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"You're a liar, just as of old, Jake, but it won't do you any good. Nemesis is on your track. Look out when the shingles begin to rattle over your head, for you will surely get heart. There's an old score to be settled up, and you must stand the pressure. Prepare, beware and tremble!"

Sharkey was already trembling, or very near it, and he felt utterly at the mercy of this man who knew so much and revealed so little. Later, when his courage returned, he would be bluff, ugly Jake Sharkey, but he had lost his nerve for the time being.

He did not answer the last warning, and utter silence followed except for the roar of the fall.

In this way seconds wore away into minutes until it gradually dawned upon the boatman that he was once more alone; that his unknown foe had beat a retreat and left him astride the bridge.

And so it proved, for when he started nobody challenged him, but he made no effort to find the unknown again; his nerves were still unstrung, and he was glad to beat a retreat toward his cabin, accompanied only by his new fears.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRIDAL EVE MYSTERY.

LUCIA was no longer fighting a lonely battle. The uncle to whom she had telegraphed, Rufus Brotherton, and his son, Adam, had appeared on the scene and taken hold of the case with vigor. Indeed, their vigor lost more friends than it gained. The old employees of Montana Mill had returned to work under Stamford's management, pending the settlement of the case, and though they were generally commended for their course, Rufus Brotherton made a bad break by bitterly assailing them verbally.

True! lawyer Barlow called him off as soon as possible, but the damage was done; the indiscreet attack, coupled with a general antipathy to both Rufus and his son, did much to turn the public into Stamford sympathizers.

Preparations for the legal battle went on daily. Stamford had Eames, one of the former partners, on the ground with his oath and sundry documents to prove that he had brought out Wells and, consequently, was the only man who could sell the mill, and that he had sold legally to Cephas Stamford.

Unless it could be proved that he lied, Stamford seemed to have all the points in his favor.

On the other hand the Brotherton faction ransacked the country to find Wells. He had sold to Horace Brotherton, and if he could be found he might tell as strange a story as did Eames. Lawyer Barlow sent letters and telegrams flying about, and advertisements were freely placed, but Wells did not appear, nor was news received of him.

The bitterness with which the campaign opened never abated. Rufus and Barlow kept affairs stirred up, and Lucia did not even recognize the rival claimants or Redgrave. She retained the carriage and horses once given her by her father, and often rode with Lot Peterson as a driver, but she rolled past them all without a look to tell that she saw them.

Rumor said that Alicia and Redgrave were soon to be married, and that the former was preparing her *trousseau*. Lucia heard these rumors, but gave no sign. If she cared, she concealed her feelings well.

After the time when the engagement was announced to her she never made any effort to pursue the inquiry so abruptly dropped, as far as they knew, and she never repeated her charges against Redgrave in connection with her father's death.

Nearly every one had become confident that Redgrave was entirely innocent. They did not know that Jake Sharkey was a happy pensioner of the secretary; they did not know what he saw from his boat that dark night.

Redgrave went on his course in the old way, except that he seemed a trifle more somber and taciturn, working faithfully and patiently for Stamford as he had before worked for Brotherton. If he carried a weight of guilt and trouble the world knew it not.

Over at the Black Shark's, but all was about as of yore. Somewhat to Bess's surprise Lucia came there no more, and seemed to have lost all interest in the untold secret. And Bess certainly made no move to reopen confidence.

Honest Jake was not happy, even though he had received one installment of the hush-money from Redgrave. It was still a mystery who had been his assailant, and what he hoped to find by searching Jake, but the latter imagined a good many disagreeable things and was sorely troubled.

He ignored his trouble with Bess, but trusted her less than before, while she often thought of Bradlock and wondered if he slept at the bottom of the river.

So glided the days away until, at last, came the legal fight for Montana Mill. Disinterested parties regarded it as just as good as settled in advance. The man, Wells, had not been found, and the Brothertons had practically no case.

Indeed, it was said that Lawyer Barlow had advised an amicable settlement with Stamford, if the latter would make a fair allowance for what the property had improved in Horace's hands, but Rufus had convinced Lucia that it was best to fight it out.

They did so in court.

And Stamford won.

It was a useless fight, yet Lucia did not change countenance when she knew the worst. Alicia beamed upon her with triumphant radiance, but her look was lost. Lucia did not even glance at her.

Redgrave, the Renegade, had certainly cast his lot with the winning side, but after every one else arose, he sat looking down at the floor as though he was attending a funeral, gloomy and silent.

"Crazy—clean gone up aloft," said one man who noticed him; yet, the following day, the secretary attended to his duties with admirable fidelity and accuracy.

Then came the official announcement of the approaching wedding—Alicia was to become Mrs. Paul Redgrave.

"He's stole ther mill fur her, an' this is his reward," said Lot Peterson bitterly, to a crowd at the hotel.

It was the only comment from any of Lucia's adherents which reached the public.

Stamford sent a note to Barlow stating that he was willing to pay something for the Brotherton improvements on the mill, but the lawyer answered that they would let the case rest for awhile.

"To find Wells," commented Stamford, tossing the reply to Redgrave. "A waiting fight now begins, and the music may not be over."

"What if Wells is found?"

It was the first time Redgrave had ever asked the question; he now made the inquiry indifferently.

"That depends on what sort of a man Wells is. If he is an adept at lying, the case may be reopened."

"I think we are safe."

"So do I."

This was the nearest the two men came to a confidential talk while they were merely master and man. After the wedding—but let us not anticipate.

The wedding was set for one week after the legal victory. Just who would be there no one knew until the eventful evening, for many believed that the invitations would be generally ignored. Those who thought so forgot the late victory.

Mammon's favorites are not usually slighted by his worshippers—and their name is legion. All Bullion Bar turned out.

All save one of the invited guests were there. That one was Lucia Brotherton. She knew very well how deep a stab was intended when she received that invitation, but she consigned it to the flames without a sign of emotion.

Then she arose and began pacing the room slowly, her head lowered, her hands clasped. Only she knew what that wedding implied to her, and what a waste she saw behind her to mark where hopes and anticipated joys had once blossomed.

Dust and ashes! That was all—all that was left. She was not wholly blameless in the case—far from it, in her own estimation—but she had not deserved all that had come to her; she had not deserved the ruin and desolation that had settled over her life.

As she turned again toward her seat she suddenly paused. Something had caught her attention. The wedding invitation, flung into the fire, had been wholly consumed except one narrow fragment. On this two words, and only two, were visible; but they stood out in bold relief:

"ALICIA STAMFORD."

Lucia remained gazing at them several seconds in silence. This woman had been the bitterest enemy of her life, and was about to do her a greater wrong than the stealing of Montana Mill.

Yes, Lucia did not attempt to deny the truth to herself; she loved Paul Redgrave, and was liable to love him long after Alicia was his wife. And until that ceremony took place she had a stronger claim upon him than even the venomous beauty who had robbed her of all she valued.

"Until then he is mine; after to-night he will be simply—Redgrave, the Renegade; the man who betrayed those to whom he owed so much. But peace, peace! There is another time coming, and I will be brave and strong. I shall yet have Judas, the Second, and her at my feet. I now live only for revenge!"

It was not a gloating, or exultant, declaration, and one would have said that there was more pain than anything else in the prospect, but she was firm.

Come what might, she was resolved to go on and bring the renegade secretary and his bride to sorrow.

At Stamford's there was no perceptible shadow of danger or trouble, and Alicia was radiant. She had won the prize for which she had schemed, and though she was heiress of Montana Mill and he but a penniless employee, she deemed it a glorious victory.

That she was a happy bride no one could doubt; the exultant smile never left her face as the ceremony was performed.

But Redgrave? People looked wonderingly at him, and then whispered to themselves, for he was a strange bridegroom. His face never lighted up; it had never been more somber. Like a machine he made his responses, and his knitted brows were more fit for a corsair brought to trial.

A strange groom, in truth, and people talked of the wedding long after. When memory would have dulled, events occurred which fanned the dying embers of memory into a fierce blaze. Still, only one person spoke his sentiments aloud at the time, and he was promptly hurried away.

"An unholy piece o' work, an' sorer an' crime will come of it!" he had said.

The speaker was Lot Peterson.

Congratulations followed the ceremony, but those addressed to Redgrave seemed worse than a farce. Alicia and her father, however, were in good spirits, and the "reception" which immediately followed was pronounced a success.

At last the guests were gone, and Alicia disappeared almost as soon as they.

"Gone to the garden," said Stamford, when he noticed it. "Go out, Redgrave, and see her; she'll be delighted, and I have a little writing to do."

The secretary went, and for nearly an hour Stamford was alone. His work was finished before then, and he had grown tired of waiting when a heavy step announced the coming of the groom. Stamford turned, a smile on his face, but it at once faded.

Paul Redgrave entered the room, but his face, usually so full of color, was pallid, and his gaze was bent fixedly ahead as though he saw a ghost. A more startling sight Stamford had seldom seen, and he started to his feet in alarm.

"Great heavens! what is wrong?" he cried.

Not by so much as the turning of an eye did the younger man show that he heard, but as he reached the door he put out one hand and felt for it like one groping in darkness. Then, before Stamford could say more, he was gone from view.

The astonished spectator took a step forward, but at that moment Alicia flashed into the room. She, too, was pale, but her expression was one of anxiety rather than like Redgrave's.

"Where is Paul?" she cried.

"Where? He's just streaked it through here as though the devil was after him—gone to his room, probably. What in the fiend's name is wrong, anyhow?"

But Alicia hurried past him, following in Paul's steps, and heedless of a second call after her.

"Great Scott! have they both gone mad? If this isn't a queer way for a bridal couple to act, I'm a liar. What in the world—but I'll know, anyhow!"

With this resolution he strode after Alicia, and overtook her just as she reached the door which separated his own apartments from those he had set apart for the use of the young couple.

"Wait!" he said, catching her arm. "In heaven's name, what does all this mean? Why are you and Paul flying about like mad creatures?"

The bride turned upon him with fierce impatience.

"Let me alone, will you?"

"Not until I know why you and Redgrave look like moving corpses when you ought to be so happy."

Alicia laughed in a hard, unnatural, almost wild, manner.

"Happy!" she echoed. "Who is truly happy but the dead? I never expect to be, and if you want your peace of mind left you will meddle here no more."

"But why? What is wrong?"

"If you want to know the power of a grizzly's grip, go to his arms; if not, keep away. Keep away from us, and bless your stars that you can. You are to be envied!"

With this strange speech, excitedly delivered, and with her bosom heaving with tumultuous emotion, the bride slammed the door in his face and the key clicked in the lock.

Stamford was shut out, and the bridal pair were shut in—shut in with only themselves and the unexplainable mystery which had come like a flash to blanch the face of one and destroy the triumphant happiness of the other. And that terrible secret—what was it?

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD MAN'S WARNING.

EIGHT months later.

As far as surface indications went there had been no great changes at Bullion Bar. Montana Mill was running as prosperously as ever, and Stamford seemed to have settled down to permanent possession. Nothing had been heard from Wells, the missing witness, but advertisements for him appeared regularly, and the Brotherton faction had never mentioned the settlement Stamford had proposed for improvements.

This seemed to show that, quiet as all was outwardly, the dispossessed parties had never abandoned hope.

Stamford & Redgrave was now the name of the firm, the ex-secretary having been made a partner, and a new man engaged, recently, in his place.

People said that Redgrave and Alicia lived happily, and even Stamford could not dispute it. The young wife certainly seemed at ease, and the husband was no more gloomy than of old. Stamford had never received an explanation of the bridal eve mystery, and it had ceased to trouble him.

Some mere foible had caused it, he thought.

Horace Brotherton slept in his grave and an imposing head-stone particularized his chief virtues, but did not tell how he had died. Nobody who cared to tell knew exactly, but even Lot Peterson's tongue no longer accused Redgrave.

People gave outward respect to Redgrave as a leading business man, but, in secret, he was often called a traitor and renegade, if not worse.

The Brothertons remained at the Bar, and Rufus and his son had started a small business which gave them a living, but they were far from being popular. Outsiders wondered why

Lucia would live with them, but she went on her way with calm unconcern.

As before she ignored Redgrave and Alicia, but if she ever spoke ill of them the general public did not hear her.

Another thing troubled these well-meaning acquaintances. It was clear to all that Adam Brotherton was a suitor for Lucia's hand, and they feared that the cousinly tie between them might not prove a sufficient barrier to prevent the union. And they deemed Adam wholly unworthy of it.

So far as his suit went, these gossips were right, but Adam's wooing had not progressed favorably. He had once been firmly, though kindly, refused, and Lucia hoped she had heard the last of it.

Her hope was vain.

One day late in winter as she sat in the main room of their little house, Rufus Brotherton joined her. He was not a man of as fine appearance as his dead brother had been, being small, poorly formed, plainly-featured and generally unprepossessing. His manner, too, was what might be termed catlike. He carried blandness to an extreme, and many persons believed his soft, almost cringing speeches were only a mask for a vicious heart.

He came in on this occasion, sat down, said a few commonplace things and then cleared his throat in a gentle way to correspond with his general manner.

My dear," he then observed, "I suppose there is no news?"

"None," Lucia answered, with a sigh.

"Have you seen Barlow lately?"

"This morning."

"Has he anything new?"

"No."

"Do you know, I have lost my confidence in him?"

"I think he has done as well as any one could."

"I believe Adam and I could have done better."

"You and Adam have also worked. What have you discovered?"

"I have discovered nothing."

"Then you are on a level with Mr. Barlow."

"Ah! but Adam—my boy has made no late report."

Lucia looked sharply at the speaker.

"Your manner is significant. Do you mean to intimate that Adam has made any discovery?"

"Adam has made a discovery; he has struck a lead where all others have failed," and Rufus's face beamed with fatherly pride.

Lucia suddenly sat more erect and her face seemed to grow stern and hard.

"What is it? Tell me at once. Is the man Wells found?" she demanded.

"Adam, by means of uncommon sagacity has found a man who claims that he can produce Wells."

"Who is this man? Where is he?"

"His name is Hickox. As to where he is I can't say. There is some mystery about the man; possibly he is a fugitive from justice, because of some crime; and he persists in keeping away from Bullion Bar."

"I will go where he is. I must see him!" Lucia said in the same emphatic way.

"Ah! but I am not sure you can. He lives in the mountains, claiming to be a trapper. Adam spoke of his coming here, but the man stoutly refused. He agreed to sell his secret to Adam for a small sum, but only because my son had chanced to save him from a grizzly's grasp. He swears he will not come here, nor see any one but Adam."

"What does he ask for his secret?"

"Probably a hundred dollars would buy it."

"Then let Adam purchase."

"He is read to do so on one condition."

Soft and bland was Mr. Brotherton's voice, and his smile was like a summer day, but Lucia's brows contracted.

"Condition?" she repeated. "Adam makes a condition? What is it?"

"My dear child," purred the father, "Adam is a man, and a young man. All young men have ambition. Some want money, others fame, and so on. My son's ambition is to call you his wife."

Rufus rubbed his hands together softly and smiled into the girl's face, but her voice was hard and unpromising as she tersely answered:

"Well?"

"Adam thinks he ought to be rewarded for his efforts, and the poor boy, loving you as he does, says he will go on in the good work if you will promise that, when Montana Mill is once more yours, you will marry him."

"So," said Lucia, scornfully, "this is his devotion to my interests—his boasted loyalty. He is like all men—the length and breadth of his loyalty depends on what he is to gain. Rufus Brotherton, this proposal is an insult."

"An insult!"

"Yes."

"My dear child—"

"Suppose I refuse the offer? Suppose I tell Adam that, whatever the result of my fight for justice, I will never be his wife? Will he then produce his witness?"

"My dear Lucia, you express yourself too bluntly—"

"Yes, or no. Which?"

"I think you will agree to the terms," said Rufus, with an uneasy squirm in his chair, "when you remember what is at stake. Montana Mill is worth—"

"I will see Adam. You were never cut out for a diplomatist, smoothly as you talk, for kingdoms would rise and fall while you were making your explanations. I need hardly ask if Adam is now near. Go out and send him here. Possibly I will barter my liberty for a secret. Send him in!"

It seemed like a point gained, but Rufus was not particularly hopeful as he arose. Lucia's imperious manner and set face were not those of a woman about to make a marriage contract. Her mood, too, was new to him; she was usually one of the most even-tempered and gracious of women. The harder element of her nature had come to the surface as it did in the early days of the fight; for Montana Mill, and it took him by surprise.

Once, as he moved toward the door, he looked back as though hoping she would say something more encouraging, but met no response. So he went through the door.

As he disappeared Lucia pressed her hand to her heart as though a sharp pain was there.

"They are all alike," she said, aloud, bitterly; "all alike. What sort of a world is this where all are treacherous and selfish to the core? Well, let Adam come—my life is a wreck, anyway, and I may as well sell to the highest bidder."

She paused, and then suddenly arose as a man—a stranger—unceremoniously entered the second door of the room.

It was one that led to Rufus's office, which, for several reasons, had been located in his dwelling-house, and the new arrival would not have been surprising had it not been for the lack of proper formality.

As it was, Lucia was surprised and not a little startled as she saw a tall, portly old man almost rush in, and she recoiled as he strode toward her with hasty steps.

"Quick!" he exclaimed, "pay attention to me while I talk, for every moment is precious. I have overheard all that has been said to you by Brotherton, and I am ready to swear he is a scoundrel of the first class. Beware how you make any terms with him. He has laid a trap for your unwary feet."

This was said so rapidly, and with such fierce gestures, that Lucia was more than ever startled. Who was this stranger that he should know anything about Rufus, and burst into the room with such a warning? She would have made her escape if she could, but he was directly in her path.

"Excuse me," she said, nervously, "but I am at present engaged and—"

"Girl, are you mad? Don't you understand? Pay attention to me. I tell you to beware of the Brothertons."

"They are my relatives, sir. Why do you attack them thus? What do you know against them?"

"I know they are plotting against you, at the least, to make you the wife of that young viper, and I suspect a good deal more. Shun them as you would a rattlesnake."

"If you are in earnest, give me definite proof—"

"This is no time or place," the old man again interrupted. "I must not be found here by them, or all would be lost. Defer giving a positive answer to their proposal, and meet me to-night. I must talk with you."

By this time his earnest manner had made an impression on Lucia. For months she had been seeking a ray of hope, and she caught at the one now presented.

"How do you know they are not sincere?" she asked.

"There is no sincerity in their hearts. They have no means of doing what they promise; it is all a fiction formed to get you in their power. Come, I hear footsteps—will you promise?"

"Yes."

"And meet me?"

"Yes. Where shall it be?"

"Do you know the giant pine at the mouth of Cutrock Canyon?"

"Yes."

"Go there to-morrow night at eight o'clock. I am a stranger to you, but I swear that you shall be as safe as though with your old and tried friends. Will you go?"

"I will, but—I shall go armed."

"Do so, and make sure your cartridges are of the best. Enough for now; I can delay no longer. Don't forget your promise. My name is Draper; remember that, too. Now—Ha! somebody comes; I must go!"

Heavy footsteps sounded almost at the door, and the old man flitted back the way he had come. Beyond the room was a narrow passage, and then the Brotherton office lay beyond. He hurriedly re-entered it, and dropped into a chair.

"If she heeds the warning all will work to my good," he muttered, as he brushed the perspiration from his face. "I am fairly enlisted to fight her relatives, and unless she marries Adam

in haste, there's hope for me. They will never get possession of Montana Mill if I can prevent it. I must get influence with Lucia and hold it, if possible, and I believe I can, though if she knew all she would as soon trust a wolf. But I'll play the hand boldly and win all or die game!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GRAVE IN THE GULCH.

If Mr. Draper had known all that had occurred around him he would not have been so well satisfied with the state of affairs. Rufus Brotherton had only needed to go to a window in order to summon Adam. That young man was awaiting his fate and watching for a signal, and he saw his father's first sign.

Consequently, the elder man's work was soon done.

He turned back through the hall and was then surprised to hear voices in the room he had just left. Who was with Lucia? Was it Lot Peterson? If so, the man's coming was untimely, and might cause Lucia to refuse the late proposal.

Mr. Brotherton was not troubled with that quality sometimes called "sense of honor," and he crept up to the door and listened eagerly. Yes, a man was there, but it was not Lot Peterson. Who could it be?

The listener could see nothing, and the voice was new to him, but the words—ah! he found enough in them, and the old, bland expression of his face gave place to one of dismay and fury. He saw all his fine plans in danger, and once he drew a knife and started to rush in and attack the unknown.

Prudence, however, prevailed, and he said and did nothing rash, but when Draper retreated to the office he saw that his time had come.

While Adam talked with Lucia, he would see this man who dared come between him and his pet scheme.

Thus it was that, after a short delay, Draper saw Rufus enter the office. Both had nearly regained their usual calmness, and the visitor had a plausible errand ready. He had ostensibly come on business, and he made the fact known in an engaging way. Brotherton met him point for point, and they discussed the matter as gravely as though both were not aware that it was all a sham.

As they talked the sound of voices was barely audible from the room where Lucia and Adam were talking, and the elder men were keenly conscious of the fact, though no distinct word reached their ears.

Twice Draper started up to leave, and twice he was detained by Rufus. The latter seemed very much interested in business, and so he was, but it was not that of which they talked.

Not until the conversation ceased in the other room did Rufus seem willing to end the interview, and then it was he who arose to intimate that he was done.

He bowed Draper out of the house, but no sooner was the door closed upon him than he flew up-stairs and burst into Adam's room. The latter was sitting by the window, looking sulky and angry.

"No use," he growled. "She asked for time—"

Rufus caught his son by the arm nervously.

"Do you see that man?" he asked, pointing out of the window.

"Yes."

"If you want to win Lucia, put a man on his track. Perhaps it will be enough to find out who he is, but—dead men tell no tales!"

"What!" gasped Adam.

"That man stands between you and Lucia."

Adam started to his feet, a most ferocious look on his coarse face.

"Explain!" he said, in a hard voice.

"There is no time now. Obey my directions, and look to me for a satisfactory explanation later. Go—don't let him escape. It is growing dark, and you—"

"Enough!"

Adam sprung to his trunk, tore it open and whisked out two articles quickly. They were a wig and false beard. In almost a twinkling he had adjusted both, and seemed an entirely different man. Rufus's small eyes gleamed approvingly.

"You'll do," he commented.

Adam made no answer, but ran lightly down the stairs. Why he was going on the trail he did not know, but he had faith enough in his scheming parent to feel sure he would never have given such directions without good reason. They had been engaged in more than one plot together, and he freely admitted that the old man's judgment was superior to his own.

When he reached the outer air Draper was no longer visible in the gathering twilight, but Adam had no great fear of losing him. He ran lightly along, keeping his eyes well open.

"I wish I knew just what the racket is, and how dangerous this man is. 'Dead men tell no tales,' the old gent said, and that was as good as permission to go ahead and snuff that fellow's candle, but the question is, is it absolutely necessary?"

Adam fingered his revolver irresolutely, but, just then, he caught sight of Draper, and his at-

tention became fixed. At the very least he was to follow the man and learn who he was and where he stopped, so he applied himself to the task with zeal.

He had expected that the old man would go to some of the hotels, as he seemed a stranger in the town, but such was not the case. Draper turned from the more thickly-settled part of the Bar and set off among the scattering residences of the poorer class.

Adam was not sorry for this; the way was rough and rocky enough to make pursuit seem safe, and there were fewer people to see him on the trail.

Draper walked on very leisurely, his head slightly lowered, and his manner thoughtful, but he seemed to know the way well. The pursuer began to feel a deep hatred for the unknown. True, he was a white-haired old man, but the word "danger" had been spoken, and Adam's natural inclinations did the rest. He began to feel a desire to beat the pursued with his hard fists, if nothing more.

Straight ahead Draper continued his course, and Adam began to feel perplexed. Dwellings were becoming scarce; where did this aged stranger make his home? In a short time the last house would be passed, and, beyond, the peaks of the range reared their snow-capped heads in cold and uninviting grandeur. It was a good place to admire at a distance, but a poor one in which to spend the night at that season of the year.

The old man, however, went on, nor did he once turn his head. No other footprints lay beside those he was making, yet he continued as serenely as though it was a beaten road and free from all danger.

Free from danger! He might yet find his mistake in making this assumption, for Adam Brotherton's eyes began to twinkle evilly. His father had said that dead men told no tales, and Draper was beyond the village at last.

What better place to forever end his career than on the barren mountain-side?

There was nobody there to see the deed, and the snow would conceal the body until it would probably be unrecognizable. Adam's hand strayed to his revolver.

"I'll do it!" he muttered. "One shot, and the old fellow will trouble us no more. It'll be all right, or the old gent would never have given me the tip."

He quickened his pace and began to close up the gap between them. The soft snow deadened his footsteps, and he gained rapidly.

It was now fully dark, but he believed he could fire just as well if he advanced near enough. If the first shot was not successful he could send five more after it, and if it came to a grapple his youth and strength would soon settle the matter. True, Draper carried a stout staff, but Adam cared nothing for that.

The pursued entered a gulch, and Adam chuckled aloud. It was the place of all places for the work. The cliffs would muffle the sound of his revolver—he would be perfectly safe in committing the deed.

Thinking thus he hastened to close up the little remaining distance, and while Draper went on as calmly as ever this stout young ruffian bore down upon him with gleaming eyes and parted lips through which showed his teeth like a wolf's. Nearer yet, and his revolver was raised for the work.

He pulled the trigger.

The report sounded dully, but Adam did not hear it. All his attention was fixed on Draper, and his heart bounded as the old man gave a lurch and then fell forward helplessly in the snow.

"Done, by the fiends!" Adam cried, and then he sprung forward to end the work if necessary.

But it did not seem to be so. Draper lay motionless, and as the assassin bent forward and touched him his hand encountered something cold and damp.

"Blood!" he muttered, starting back.

It was a momentarily-unpleasant sensation, even to him, and he glanced about nervously, expecting some one to start into view and accuse him.

No one came, however, and the "weakness" soon vanished.

"A good job well done," he said, aloud. "Whoever he was he will never tell any tales. I'll scoop out a hole in the snow and give him a good, soft bed."

Laughing at what he deemed his humor, he turned to the cliff. Here the snow lay in a deep drift, and by the aid of a branch wrenched from a tree he was able to make an excavation without much trouble.

"That'll do," he said, at last, throwing the stick away. "He'll sleep just as well there as in a stone vault. Downy couch as man could wish, and the old gulch is a good burying ground."

He turned at the last word, and started back with a cry.

The dead had returned to life.

Beside him stood Draper, as tall and erect as ever, his face turned sternly toward his would-be murderer, and one hand pointing to the snowy grave.

"Adam Brotherton," he said, in a deep voice, "the grave you dug is your own. Lie down!"

For a while Adam was too startled to answer, or move, or think coherently, but it gradually dawned upon him that he saw no ghost, but that his work had failed and the old man stood before him in the flesh and in life. Even at that the ruffian was a badly frightened man, and the solemn words and gesture of his companion seemed to chill his blood.

"You say this gulch would make a good burial ground," Draper added. "Well, set the example and be its first dead. I decline to lie here. You are a very stupid murderer, my man; I knew you were on my track, and lured you here on purpose. I made one error in supposing you would not dare use a revolver, but you lost your chance by firing wild. When I fell it was but an artifice, and the supposed blood you felt was nothing but snow. You're a stupid fellow for a murderer."

"By the Old Nick, the chance ain't lost yet!" Adam hissed, and sprang at Draper like a panther.

He did not reach him. The stout staff performed a circle in the air and then fell upon Brotherton's head, and he was brought to his knees, dazed and terrified.

"Do you want more?" Draper coldly asked.

"Mercy, mercy!" Adam faintly grasped.

"You to call for mercy!" scornfully retorted the elder man. "You followed me here with murder in your heart, and tried to do the deed. Now you ask for mercy. You are a fool as well as a villain."

"It was all a mistake—I thought you was another man," protested the villain, with what he deemed a bright thought.

"Adam Brotherton, your lie is as stupid as yourself. You followed me from your own house and I know it. Now look here, fellow—you had better not oppose yourself to me. You will only score a complete failure, and your punishment will be the harder. I told you awhile ago that your grave was to be in this gulch. How long a lease of life you have left all depends on yourself, but beware how you molest me. The next time I have you at my mercy you will not fare so well. Get up!"

Adam gladly obeyed.

"Do you know why I spare your miserable life?"

"No."

"'Tis not from any friendly motive, rest assured of that. It is because Nemesis is on your track, and I want you to suffer all that man can suffer before you die. You wretch, you are not fit to live, and death disdains such victims as you. Go, and beware what you do. Go!"

Adam went, but not with his courage at such low pitch as before. The permission to depart had reawakened his natural feeling, and with them came a desire to carry out his appointed work.

He suddenly remembered that he had a revolver and his hand slid that way, but the aged stranger appeared to have strangely keen eyes.

"Stop!" he sharply ordered. "Did I not bid you beware of the next time you tried your tricks on me? Keep your hand from that revolver, or I will shoot a little. I never miss!"

"I was going to—"

"You are lying, but that is nothing strange. Once more I bid you go, but take this warning. Scheme as you will, hunt me as you may, all your efforts will prove useless against me. The bullet is not run that can harm me, and I am proof against steel. Be careful how you meddle with me. Go!"

The unknown stretched his hand imperiously down the gulch, and Adam Brotherton, angry and ugly, but feeling the folly of further effort, skulked off like a wolf cheated of his prey.

But the spirit of murder was still in his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW BOOKKEEPER.

STAMFORD and Redgrave were very much pleased with their new employee, of whom mention has already been made. He proved to be rapid at figures and a fine penman, and he "took hold" of the business, as Stamford expressed it, remarkably well in all ways.

Besides this he was a pleasant, genial young man, quick, willing and good-humored, and the elder partner was free to say that they had secured a jewel. Indeed, he was so much impressed, he suggested that they take Mr. Cowles into their own family, and not run the risk of losing him by forcing him to endure hotel life.

He had been in his new quarters just one week when, the evening of the occurrences of the previous chapters, he found himself alone in the sitting-room with Mrs. Redgrave. Stamford was busy in the next room over a private letter, and Paul engaged in some way.

It was nothing new for the latter to desert his friends of an evening; he had never been social since his marriage, if, indeed, ever before, and his absence now passed unnoticed in one sense of the word.

There was silence in the sitting-room; a silence so profound that the scratching of Mr. Stamford's pen in the next room could occasionally be heard.

Alicia was sewing, and as she worked she oc-

asionally glanced at the bookkeeper as he pored over a daily paper. A handsome young man Mr. Cowles certainly was, and Alicia, who had not lost her eyesight since she became Mrs. Redgrave, was not ignorant of the fact.

She, too, had been favorably impressed by him, and she could not help thinking now that if Paul was only as lively and good-humored, she should enjoy life a good deal more.

All at once Alicia blushed. This was a singular thing for her to do, especially on such slight cause. Mr. Cowles had merely looked up from his paper and met her glance; a trifling thing, yet it caused a pink wave to sweep to her cheeks.

He smiled quietly.

"You are always busy, Mrs. Redgrave."

"Not quite so bad as that."

"Do you know, I detest sewing."

"You! What do you know about it?"

"My dear madam, remember that I am a bachelor, and don't ask for particulars. If I am not skillful with the needle it's not because I have never pierced my fingers with a needle like a sieve."

All this in his gay, airy way, and Alicia smiled while he spoke. Then she grew grave suddenly.

"I detest sewing, also."

"Then why do you sew?"

"I've got to do something. I can't sit like a post all the time."

"I should suppose you and Mr. Redgrave would play chess or cards, or read aloud."

"He amuses himself, and I do the same."

Alicia spoke curtly, and Mr. Cowles looked more thoughtful than usual. He did not fail to read the signs of the times, and he had a mind that weighed every circumstance quickly, despite his careless exterior. He never studied a companion more closely than when he talked the most nonsense.

"Pardon me if I offend, Mrs. Redgrave, but I don't see how Mr. Redgrave can amuse himself any more—nor half so much—as to stay with his wife," he gracefully observed.

"He don't seem to think so," replied Alicia, dropping her eyes before the bookkeeper's gaze.

"That's confounded odd."

"Besides, it's not the fashion for men to stay in of evenings now."

"By Jove, I shall never go out of an evening if I get as charming a wife as—as I may get."

Impetuously enough Cowles had spoken until he was nearly through, and then he stopped, hesitated and finished in a commonplace way. He had run so near the rocks as to graze the ledge, and then escaped as only a practiced navigator can. Alicia would have been very obtuse not to understand what the interrupted speech was, and she felt a trifle confused. She, too, saw the beacon light of danger, and was wise enough to wish the subject dropped.

Of course Cowles was only a light-headed boy—he was not in the least her junior—and he meant no harm, but it was not for her to hear compliments which would once have been pleasant.

She was now Paul Redgrave's wife.

Calmly, serenely, Cowles changed the subject, and when Stamford entered the room they were talking in the most commonplace manner imaginable. The two men then began to speak on matters not of interest to Alicia. She dropped out of the conversation, but listened with a mixture of indifference and curiosity.

She was surprised to see how well the bookkeeper talked. Although a young man, he seemed to be thoroughly informed on all subjects, and he had a way of presenting his views which easily convinced others.

Alicia did not hesitate to admit that he was a very attractive gentleman, and she was glad he had become a member of their family. He might serve to brighten some of her otherwise lonely hours.

Anon Redgrave re-entered the room. He spoke to no one, looked at no one, but went silently to a chair and took up the paper Cowles had discarded. Alicia spoke to him, and he answered in a curt monosyllable.

She looked away and met Cowles's glance, quiet, respectful, sympathetic yet searching. Then Alicia flushed again. Paul had spoken harshly to her in the presence of the man who had said that if he had a wife as charming as—

But she had better forget that, so she bent over her work and said no more.

Soon after the bookkeeper looked at his watch, arose, put on his hat and went outdoors. Once beyond the house he lighted a cigar. Like most smokers he always wanted to smoke when anything, good or bad, or simply suggestive, occurred. He wanted to smoke then.

Without much idea of where he was going he walked on steadily his head bent in thought. The events of the evening, simple as they were, impressed him deeply in one respect, and he went over them in fancy, weighing each bit of evidence.

His thoughts ran about as follows:

"All is not halcyon weather with the Redgraves. The fair Alicia is not so much in love as she was, and on that point, at least, I do not hold her so much to blame. Redgrave is a surly rascal, and undeserving of fidelity. True,

Alicia is not a model woman, but the bond of crime ought to hold them together. It does not, and I believe I see a chance in their coldness for me to further my own ends. I ask no more pliable tool than a woman who would let herself be made a cat's-paw. Unless I mistake I see a clear road to success, and Alicia shall help me along the road. Ha! this is right good for me."

He laughed lightly, raised his hat and ran his fingers through his hair with a sweep which might well be called buoyant. He could not long be anything but his old, light-hearted self.

He had reached a saloon, and the light and gaiety within proved an irresistible attraction. He entered and stood looking carelessly around.

It was not an unusual sight, and after a brief pause, he went to a table and sat down. He had casually noticed that one man was already there, but this seemed a trifling circumstance; the man's face was turned away, and he hardly looked at him. Thoughts of the situation at Redgrave's still engaged the bookkeeper's attention.

After a few minutes, however, his neighbor turned, and Cowles was sensible of a sudden start. He turned slowly, and met the gaze of a pair of astonished eyes which were looking him full in the face.

The other man was the Black Shark.

Cowles smiled lightly and returned the gaze, but the boatman did not appear to feel like smiling. His face wore an expression of dismay, if not of fear, and he made a motion to rise.

"Wait a moment, Jacob," said the younger man, in his careless way.

"I—I'm in a hurry," stammered Sharkey.

"So I see, but don't tear yourself away. It is long since we met, amiable Jacob."

"I never seen you afore."

"Don't lie, honest man. It's a bad habit, and grows on one. Sit down and take life easy. How well I remember you, and the talk we had that dark night. Knives were trumps then—eh, Jacob?"

The boatman leaned back in his chair, sullen and ugly, yet with plenty of fear of this careless young fellow. He did not like to remain, and dared not go.

"Didn't know I was back at the Bar, did you?" Cowles continued.

"No."

"I am. Working for Stamford & Redgrave."

"Do they know ther sort o' man they hev hired?"

"Do you, Jacob?"

"No," Sharkey sullenly admitted.

"You know I visited you one night, and gave the name of Bradlock. Well, I'm now Bradlock Cowles; only a trifle variation of the old name."

"What new mischief be you up ter?" suspiciously demanded the boatman.

"Don't call it that, Jacob. You don't know what you're talking about. Now, I am free to say to you that you had better be my friend. When I visited your house last year, and inquired about Meg Warner, I was at the beginning of my trail. It would have ended right there if you had had your way—you remember how you asked me out and tried to run a knife through me, don't you? A handy chap you are with a knife, Jakey, but it didn't work that time. It never will work against me. You would like to kill me, yet I am going to live right here in town with you, and see you daily, and you will not do me harm."

Jake gnawed fiercely at his stubbly mustache, and looked the desperado he was, but Bradlock Cowles, still smiling, went on lightly.

"You don't dare to be my enemy."

"Curse you!" growled the boatman.

"Meg Warner's ghost stands between us."

"Don't tempt me too fur."

"Tempt you? Bless your heart, Jacob, you can't be hungrier for gore than you are; you would kill me now if you could, but you can't. I bear a charmed life. But about Meg."

"Curse you, drop it!" said Sharkey, looking apprehensively around.

"No, we must speak about her. Nobody here knows who she was, and she will never rise to accuse you. You buried her deeply, Jacob."

The boatman glared fiercely about. These were dangerous words, and he feared some other person would overhear them. His reputation was not such that he could defy any new rumors concerning his misdeeds, and he was in a fever of fear. Looking back at Cowles, he wondered what manner of man he was. A mocking fiend he seemed; his careless, happy-go-lucky manner was worse to Sharkey than anything else could have been.

"I don't care particularly for Meg Warner," the bookkeeper continued, "for she was a Jezebel, anyhow, but there is more to this matter than I do not care for. Meg was the tool of others, and she managed to do a good deal of mischief. I would like to straighten the snarl out."

"Mebbe I kin tell you," said Sharkey, suddenly brightening.

"Will you?"

"Yas, ef you pay for it."

"I will."

"How much?"

"According to its worth."

"I want a sum agreed on ahead."

"I shall make no such agreement. The more I agreed to give, the bigger lie you would tell. What I want is the truth. Tell that and you shall be paid, but bear in mind that I shall weigh your words, sift out your fictions and subtract something for every lie."

This was not very promising, and the boatman felt like refusing to speak at all, but he was very anxious to get Bradlock Cowles's goodwill, and he decided to talk.

"I see now why you went ter work fur Stamford," he observed.

"Perhaps you also see that if you tell Stamford, I will hand you over to the hangman," coolly replied Cowles.

"I ain't goin' ter tell," was the hurried reply.

"I dunno why you persist in misusin' me."

"Amble on with your story."

"Wal, ye see Meg was an ole friend o' my wife, an' when she went ter work fur ther Stamford she sorter kept up ther intermacy; but Meg, she fell 'mong thieves when she went ter Stamford's. Ther old man he had two sons, Cephas and Ralph, an' they was jest at sword-p'ints all ther time, keepin' ther old man on ther jump ter know which ter side with."

"Cephas was a long-headed chap, though, an' he began ter p'izen ther old chap's mind ag'in' Ralph. It was ther old story; he coveted ther dollars which was ter be left ter somebody. An' he got thar in ther end like a good little man."

"Ralph was more high-spirited than wise, an' when he saw ther tide goin' dead ag'in' him, he jest let it go. He left ther old man's roof an' went out ter hoe his own row in the world, thus givin' Cephas a clear swing. You bet it was improved, an' ther boy lived in clover fur a few years, easin' ther old gent down ter ther grave with a gentle hand an' plenty o' soft soap."

"The way of the world," Cowles tersely interrupted. "Go on, Jacob."

"Wal, ther silver thread finally snapped—how, I don't know; but when ther old man lay dyin', he sent fur his lawyer in a rage an' made a new will, in which Cephas was cut short off, an' ther whole boodle gi'n ter Ralph or his heirs."

"He died, an' thar was a hue an' cry fur Ralph. The disinherited brother was ther first ter strike ther trail, an' though he found Ralph dead, he found a child left who would heir all ther wealth."

"Then it was that Meg Warner came inter play. That brainy Cephas had sized her up well, an' when he offered her money ter steal ther kid she jumped at ther chance. An', b'gosh, ther kid was stole. When ther slow pokes o' law got around, thar was no heir ter be found."

"Do you know that Meg stole the child?" Cowles asked.

"She said she did."

"And brought it to your house?"

"No; bless you, no. No kid was brought thar."

"So! That is all right, perhaps; but since you admit that she stole the boy, let me ask what became of him. Where is he now?"

CHAPTER XV.

A SCRAP OF FAMILY HISTORY.

SHARKEY shook his head.

"You'll never find ther boy. Meg put him out o' ther way o' Cephas Stamford forever."

"How?"

"Dropped him inter a canyon in ther mountains."

"To starve?"

"Not much. It was two hundred foot deep—I reckon by ther time ther kid reached ther bottom, thar wa'n't much left o' him. O' course it smashed him ter pieces."

"Meg confessed this to you?"

"Yes."

Several seconds passed before Cowles spoke again. His smile had vanished, and he was plainly thinking deeply. Perhaps he was weighing what Sharkey had said, as threatened, but his face was unreadable to the anxious boatman.

"Jacob," the bookkeeper finally said, "from what town did Meg steal the boy?"

"I don't know; she never told that."

"And the boy's mother—what of her?"

"Dunno. Meg had nothin' ter do with her, I reckon."

"Have you told me all you know?"

"Ev'ry word."

"Remember you are to be paid for what you tell."

"But only fur ther truth," Jake dryly added.

"True, but you are keeping something back. Let me enliven your memory. When I came to the Bar last year it was on this same errand, but I did not see fit to call on you. I went to your daughter, hoping to get news of Meg Warner, not knowing then that the woman was dead. I was talking with Bess when you interrupted, and asked me outside. You remember what happened there."

Sharkey moved uneasily in his chair, but Cowles calmly continued:

"You tried to kill me and failed, and then

went off in a passion. Now for something you do not know. I was afraid that you would harm your innocent daughter in your wrath, so I followed. You went up-stairs; I went a part of the way and still watched you."

Again the boatman moved uneasily, and he looked the rage and hatred he dared not utter.

"You found Bess just opening some old document, and snatched it from her with curses, thrusting it in your pocket. Bess was not afraid of you, and there was a war of words, all of which amounted to nothing, and when you cooled down a bit I made my retreat."

"I supposed that paper was something of no interest to me, but future reflections changed that opinion. Are you sure, Jacob, that the paper would not interest me?"

The old smile was on Bradlock's lips, but his eyes looked keenly into the boatman's. Nothing escaped his notice, and he interpreted the falling of Jake's gaze as he saw fit.

"I don't know why it should int'rest you," he said, sulkily.

"I can't get the idea out of my head that the paper was connected with Meg Warner."

"Bah! it wasn't."

"Prove it by showing me the paper."

"I can't. It's lost."

"Lost?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure as sermons is sermons. I'd like it back myself, but ther durned thing slipped through a hole in my pocket an' I couldn't find it arterwards."

Sharkey boldly met Bradlock's sharp scrutiny as he said this, and the latter was forced to believe him.

"What did the paper relate to?"

"Nothin' you would keer ter know about. It wa'n't nothin' about Meg Warner."

The bookkeeper leaned his head on his hand and appeared to meditate deeply. Sharkey watched him narrowly. He was anxious that his last statement should be believed, though he had told the truth when he said that the paper was lost. That could not be produced, whatever the inducement, so he wanted Cowles to believe and let the matter rest.

How he hated this man! He would have given a good deal to turn his revolver upon him and wind up Mr. Bradlock Cowles's career forever, but he had a feeling that he would get the worst of it. He feared the quiet, careless young man as he had never feared any one before; he impressed him as one like a sleeping tiger. Once arouse him from his inaction, and a whirlwind would be let loose.

Sharkey had seen men who smiled when they said disagreeable things, and men who scowled, and he knew that the loud-mouthed bravo was a safe enemy compared to the man who smiled.

Cowles suddenly aroused.

"I believe you have told me some part of the truth, Jacob," he said, in his old manner, "and you shall be paid for it. I knew the greater part of it before, but it is all the same. Now, my honest friend, what of the future?"

"The future?"

"Yes."

"I dunno what you mean."

"Are you going to go howling around after my blood just because I know how Meg Warner died? Are you going to watch day and night for a chance to kill me?"

"I'm a misused man," whined the boatman. "I never harmed Meg, an' I ain't got no idee o' harmin' you."

"You'd better not," interrupted Cowles.

"You'd get the worst of it, sure as you're born. Again, I may need a stout rascal like you to do delicate work for me, and such work always pays with a good master."

Sharkey's eyes brightened.

"I'm your man!" he declared.

"Come what may."

"Yes, you bet."

"So be it then. Birds of a feather ought to agree, and you and I have a good deal of the devil in us. Isn't that so, amiable Jacob?"

"I reckon so," Sharkey modestly replied.

"Give us your honest hand on it."

It was done, but the boatman shivered as Cowles smiled in his face. The more he saw that smile the less he liked it. He was ready to believe that his companion had a good deal of the "devil" in his nature, and a brain too acute for him to match. He wished he had never seen Mr. Bradlock Cowles.

The latter paid for the news he had secured to Jacob's satisfaction, and then the two parted. Cowles, at least, went directly home.

When he reached the house there was at first no evidence that any one was astir except a light in one of the lower rooms, and, believing it had been left for him, he was about to go in when the sound of voices stopped him.

Paul Redgrave was speaking slowly and calmly.

"If my fancy for you has cooled, perhaps it is as much your fault as mine," he said.

"You never cared for me."

"It was a bitter retort in Alicia's voice."

"I married you," was the stolid reply.

"To spite Lucia Brotherton."

"She did not care a pin."

"Oh! that's very well for you to say, but I know too much about your old love affairs to be fooled. You two were still in love when we were married."

"You insult Miss Brotherton."

"Indeed! How tender you are of her," Alicia sneered.

"She is my bitter enemy."

"Naturally, now. A woman of spirit don't forgive a flunk like yours. Very likely she would be glad to cut your throat now."

"And you would be glad to have her," Redgrave bitterly answered.

"That shows your good opinion of me. A loving husband you are, I must say."

"Woman, don't go too far. You remember what occurred the night of our marriage. Can you ask for my respect after that?"

"More fine talk! You make a poor critic—you who, the world says, killed Horace Brotherton."

"What if I did? Did it not help you win Montana Mill? Was I not working for you?"

"No; you killed him out of revenge, because of the harsh things he had said against you. You need not act the stoic in my presence, Paul Redgrave; I know you too well. There is as much fire in your nature as in anybody's, skillfully as you disguise the fact. You are all the more dangerous because of that."

"Think of me as you will; I care not."

"You care for nothing, and nobody, but Lucia."

There was no reply. Redgrave bore the taunt in silence, and no more was said for a few moments. The bookkeeper stood outside the door and smiled. He had plans which made all this pleasant to him. Now that he knew the state of affairs between Redgrave and his wife his own way seemed clearer.

"I know your past very clearly, Mr. Redgrave," continued Alicia. "I have not forgotten the days before we all came West. When I first knew you, you were a meek and lowly clerk in Horace Brotherton's employ, almost daily reminded that you had been raised from the slums by him."

"You did not care a picayune for him, but you did care for Lucia. I suppose she was a new revelation to you. In your career in the slums you did not see any like her, and when she paid a little attention to you it turned your head."

"What she saw in you to awaken admiration the Lord only knows. I remember you as an ill-formed, surly boy, just what might be expected to precede such a man as you now are."

The venomous voice paused, but not a word came from Redgrave. If Cowles could have seen him he would have seen a heavy figure settled back in a deep chair, looking as stoical as the Sphinx.

"It came near being a match if you were a child of the slums, for dear Lucia became interested. I fancy it would have been done only for me. I always hated that girl, though she and I had never spoken, and I think did not know me by sight until she caught us walking in lover-fashion that evening. That opened her eyes a trifle, and she gave you the cold shoulder, but you got square in the end. You married me to spite her."

Another pause, and then Redgrave's voice, cold and hard, but as calm as ever:

"Surely you are not done, Alicia?"

"Do you want to hear more?"

"If you please."

"Then I won't say any more," snapped Mrs. Redgrave, "but this much you are to understand. I will not be scorned or slighted by you. I am your wife, and I will have the attention and respect due me."

"Respect!" repeated Redgrave, sarcastically.

"Am I not as good as you?"

"We will not argue the point."

Cowles had heard Alicia arise, and as Paul's feet sounded on the floor he slipped quietly away and went to his own room. He had no wish to have it known that he had overheard this conversation.

"Rather a bad state of affairs," he soliloquized, as he prepared to retire, "but I don't know which to pity. They seem to have been cut from the same piece, and I reckon sympathy would be thrown away on them. What I heard is of interest to me, anyhow. Let me see how I can turn it to my good."

"First, I've got a few scraps of family history which are of importance, and it strikes me an alliance with this Lucia Brotherton may yet become advisable."

"Secondly, it is clear that this is not a happy family, and much as I dislike it, I must continue to widen the breach. Alicia must be my ally—my cat's paw to pull victory out of the fire. I'm playing a deep game, and I mustn't stand on ceremony. With Alicia and Jacob as my allies I can play any kind of card I wish."

CHAPTER XVI.

A PERILOUS JOURNEY.

LUCIA BROTHERTON was unconscious of the dangers gathering about her and the aged stranger who had so abruptly appeared and an-

nounced himself as her friend. She had no suspicion that their conversation had been overheard by Rufus Brotherton, nor that he had sent Adam in pursuit of Draper.

To Adam she had given no definite reply to his repeated offer of marriage. Following Draper's advice she had asked for delay, and she hoped the next few days would show her a way out of her trouble.

She had an amount of faith in Draper for which she could not account. There seemed no good reason why she should trust an utter stranger's vague words thus, yet she did feel a surprising degree of hope.

He had promised aid, and she was in a mood to catch at any straw.

The following day was not a pleasant one to any of the household. Lucia, ignorant of the fact that all her new plans were known to her relatives, tried to appear at ease, but hourly grew more nervous as she saw night approach.

She had promised to meet Draper at Cutrock Canyon, and she began to realize what the promise implied. What dangers might lurk by the way she dared not consider.

Rufus and his son were also ill at ease. The unfavorable termination of Adam's attempt to slay Draper left them in constant fear that justice would seek them, and they, too, were obliged to feign composure they were far from feeling. They were really in a bad fix. It had been bad enough when they heard Draper warn Lucia against them, but now that Adam stood a convicted and unsuccessful murderer, they seemed to see the whole world tumbling to pieces around their heads.

Rufus, however, was a man not easily crushed, and, as night drew near, he rallied somewhat and consulted with his son.

Lucia had agreed to meet Draper at Cutrock Canyon, and her uncle believed it best to let her go, to take care that she did not see Draper, and give her a lesson which would prevent her trusting to strangers again.

Arrangements were made to this end.

Unconscious of the trouble being prepared for her, Lucia remained firm in her resolution to keep the appointment. She carefully cleaned her revolver and filled it with fresh cartridges, for she did not wholly trust the unknown old man. She was risking a good deal and she knew it. The bleak mountain-side was not a safe place at that hour.

She saw the appointed time approach with increased anxiety, but not once did her resolution waver.

After supper she pleaded a headache and retired to her room, and there her few remaining preparations were made.

As soon as it was fairly dark she slipped quietly from the house and moved swiftly out of the village. The night promised to be one of storm, and, even then, heavy clouds hung in the sky and the air was thick with cold moisture. She glanced once at the unpromising heavens and then dismissed the subject with the thought that she should be home before the storm could fairly break.

Through the village she had a beaten track, but, beyond, not a footprint was visible in the snow. Perhaps it was just as well, for she knew the way to Cutrock Canyon well, but it seemed like going into a wilderness.

All before her was a sea of white.

Pausing for a moment only she then moved on. It was well she was warmly clad, for the snow seemed unusually cold to her feet, and the wayward wind whirled the white particles about her, covering her garments and steadily filling her footprints.

The place of meeting was over half a mile away, and she began the journey anew with rapid steps. The way was rough, and she did not want to keep Draper waiting.

The distance had never seemed so long, but, after many a slip and stumble, she reached the canyon and stood at the very point to which she had been directed to come. Far above her on the verge of the cliff towered the huge pine which had long been a landmark to Bullion Bar.

She was there, but where was Draper?

No one appeared to greet her, and she looked for him in vain.

She regretted having left her watch at home, as she could not definitely learn the time. She believed it to be fully eight o'clock, but there was no way to settle the question. However it might be she was on hand—and alone. The wind wailed through the canyon and the snow sifted over the cliff, but Lucia could see only a few feet away.

It was a dark, bleak night, and the girl shivered.

Somehow, even then, her thoughts went back to the changes a few years had made in her life. Once all had been sunshine and she was the lightest-hearted of maidens. Now, life was only a desert to her, and she had grown hard and bitter under the hand of trouble.

And for this great change she was indebted to—Redgrave, the Renegade!

Lucia shivered again—this time it was not caused by the wailing wind or sifting snow—but her blood suddenly bounded anew as she saw a dark object appear amidst the white wilderness before her.

It moved—resolved itself into the form of a man—it approached.

Lucia laid her hand on her revolver. The other night rover might not be Draper—it was not he.

She saw this now, and new fear assailed her. What danger had she dared by this wild journey? She had grown cold again, but the man came straight toward her and removed his hat politely.

"Beg yer pardon, mum," he said, "but be you Miss Brotherton?"

Lucia hesitated and then answered affirmatively.

"Then you're ther one I want ter find. Draper sent me."

"Who is Draper?" the girl warily asked.

"Ther old gent who lives up yonder in ther gulch. Don't know much about him myself, only I owe him one fur savin' me from a grizzly, an' he kin command me arter this. He's under ther weather ter-night, an' sent me ter guide you thar."

"And who are you?"

"Bob Hurst is my name."

"I never heard of you."

"I live over at Hermit's Folly."

"How far is it to Draper's house?" Lucia asked, after a pause.

"Half a mile, mebbe."

"You say he is sick?"

"Yes; got a cold on his chist an' barks like a wolf."

Still the girl hesitated. The situation had assumed even more unfavorable aspects, and her fears warned her not to go. On the other hand she might throw away the last chance of getting the clew she desired. It was a painful situation, and her hesitation was not to be wondered at.

Should she go or not? Just then she remembered the revolver in her hand, and her resolution was at once formed. She had at least one friend, and she was no mean marksman.

"Lead on!" she said, decisively.

"This way, mum."

Hurst turned, and the journey was begun. Through the canyon they went, and then along the hillside which succeeded the rocky left wall. Lucia was braver than was to be expected, but she took the precaution of always following in her guide's footsteps. He did not object to this, and his whole manner was encouraging; he was respectful, good-natured, and, for so rough a man, very gentlemanly in his way.

Beyond the canyon the journey was a hard one. It was a laborious ascent, and the light snow covered the rocks upon which they often slipped and stumbled, but Lucia did not falter.

Her resolution was made, and she went bravely on, her hand always holding her revolver.

Hurst talked pleasantly, though never to excess, and it only needed a successful termination to the adventure to give the girl a good opinion of him.

But the journey seemed unexpectedly long, and she looked in vain for Draper's cabin. Once she spoke of it to her guide, and he assured her they were nearly there. She sincerely hoped so, for the wind swept the mountain-side wildly, whirling the snow more than ever, and she was becoming chilled through.

Anon she noticed that Hurst was going slower and looking about a good deal, and he finally came to a halt. Lucia looked around, but saw only the bleak rocks and drifted snow.

"Where is the cabin?" she asked.

"It must be nigh here."

"What do you mean?"

"Miss, be you wal acquainted hyar?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"I don't find the cabin ez I expected."

"Do you mean that you are lost?" demanded Lucia, new fear assailing her.

"Lost? Bless you, no; but ther snow is in my eyes, ye see, I reckon ther cabin is in that gulch—yes, that must be ther place."

He spoke cheerfully and trudged on again, but when the gulch was entered they saw only a trackless waste of snow. He paused again.

"It's mighty cur'us," he muttered.

"Tell me the truth. Have you lost your way?" Hurst hesitated.

"I may as well know the truth," Lucia added.

"I reckon you're about right, an' durn me fur a blind owl, you're right t'other way, too. Yes, I'm afeard I have got lost."

Lucia's heart sunk. She knew only too well what that meant. The mountain lacked but little of being a labyrinth, and though they might soon have settled their position if it had been a clear day, it might prove a very serious matter in this dark night. She had heard that, in the early days of Bullion Bar, three hardy hunters had actually been caught in a snowstorm and frozen before they could find their way back to the town.

"Have you no idea which way the cabin is?"

"N-o," he hesitatingly acknowledged.

"Which way is Bullion Bar?"

"There!"

He pointed unhesitatingly, but in a direction far at variance with what she thought right. They no longer had a hillside to give a clew to the points of the compass; and they were in a part of the mountain where all was valley and ridge, and one way was the same as another.

To add to the gravity of the occasion, it was then snowing briskly.

"How much do you know about the mountain-side?" she curtly asked.

"Wal, not so very much—"

"How many times were you ever here before?"

"Once or twice."

Lucia caught her breath sharply; they were lost in a region strange to both of them.

"Stand still and consider carefully which direction you should take to find the cabin," she said, after a pause, "and then make another effort. We shall freeze to death here on the mountain otherwise."

"Oh, no; at the worst we kin build a fire—"

"Why do you stop?"

"Have you a match?"

"No."

Hurst whistled lugubriously.

"We're in fur it, then. I haven't none."

This might prove a fatal want, but, just then, Lucia did not realize it fully. She was not thinking of camping on the mountain, but of finding either the cabin or the town.

"Go on!" she said, nervously. "Make one more effort to find Draper's cabin. If you fail I must return to Bullion Bar at once."

"Don't be skeered, miss; I'll see you safe through, an' it's a cold day when I git left. We'll soon be out o' ther cold, an' ev'rythin' 'll hum on wheels."

With this rude attempt at reassurance Hurst went on. He moved slowly and tried to use his eyes to good advantage, but the air was laden with snow and it was made almost an impossibility. He could see but a few steps in advance.

Ten minutes they struggled about in the snow, stumbling over rocks and other obstructions, and then he abruptly paused.

"It's no use," he said; "I've got ter give it up. I don't know north from south, an' I may ez wal say it. I've lost my way, an' whar ther cabin is I don't know!"

"So I thought," said Lucia, with the calmness of desperation. "We have got to give up, and I will return to the Bar. It is the only hope."

"Which way would ye go?"

"There," and she pointed.

"No, no; that's wrong," Hurst declared.

Lucia looked at him as closely as was possible.

"Do you really think so?"

"Certain I do."

"Then we are completely lost!"

She made the admission with a sinking heart, and a feeling of coldness not wholly due the sharp air. She remembered the hunters who had been frozen on the mountain, and wondered what hope a delicate woman had where they had succumbed to the storm and cold.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEFT TO DIE!

HURST tried to speak cheerfully.

"Oh! I reckon it ain't so bad as that, miss," he said. "We'll find ther way ter Bullion Bar all right."

"But we differ as to which is the proper way."

"We kin try both."

"No. Whichever way we start we shall be completely at fault in five minutes. The rocks will compel us to take a devious course, there is not a star to guide us, and even the wind has no direct course in this wild region. When we start it will be a haphazard journey, and we are liable to freeze on the mountain."

"Be you cold?"

"Yes, but let me not think of that. Exercise is now my best friend. I must exercise, or the cold will overcome me."

"Ain't thar a cave nowhar?"

"There may be, but where is it? I know of none, and, even if I did, I could not find it. Let us go on!"

She made a move to start in the direction she had indicated as toward the Bar, and Hurst did not object. He pushed to the front and trudged on manfully. Lucia doubted him no longer; there was something in his manner which told her he would be faithful to the end.

Half an hour of laborious effort followed, and they wound around among the gulches, trying to keep to a direct course; yet with an unspoken opinion from both that all such efforts would be in vain. Then Hurst suddenly paused, and appeared to be looking intently at something.

"What is it?" Lucia asked.

"Shoot me ef I don't b'lieve our last trip has been all in vain. Ain't this ther cliff we stood by afore?"

Lucia looked.

"It is, indeed—we have wandered back to where we started. Our case is desperate. I have heard it said that these gulches were like a labyrinth, and now I see why. We are helplessly, hopelessly lost!"

She felt like sinking to the ground in despair, and an interval of silence followed. Then Hurst muttered a few indistinct words.

"What did you say?" Lucia asked.

"Nothin' much."

"I understood you to say, 'I am a villain.'"

"Ef I did you needn't notice it," he replied, with energy. "One thing is dead sure, an' that

is I am ready ter work, or fight, fur you ter ther end. I can't keep off ther cold, but I'm a strong man an' I'll give my life, ef need be, fur you. Depend on that."

She wondered even then at his fervor, but her mind wandered to more important matters.

"It will not do to stand here. The cold is intense, and we must go on. Our only hope is to find shelter."

"Be you sure you ain't got a match?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry. We could build a fire in the shelter o' a cliff and live it out, but that settles it. We must go on an' try fur Bullion Bar."

"Do you think we are near Draper's cabin?"

"Yes. No—we've most likely wandered fur away. I don't see no hope o' that; we've got ter go fur ther Bar. Shall I help ye? I can take some o' yer weight on my arm, an' I'd like ter do it ter pay fur gettin' ye lost."

His manner was so remorseful that Lucia's kind heart was touched, and she assured him she did not blame him in the least, took his arm, and once more their wandering journey was resumed.

The snow was falling in great flakes, and the wind whistled dolefully through the gulches. It was an extremely bad night to be on the mountain, and there was greater fear in Hurst's heart than he would acknowledge.

He had but little hope that Lucia would ever see Bullion Bar again.

The new attempt was only a repetition of what had gone before. They used every effort to maintain a direct course, but nothing occurred to show them that they were on the right road, and Lucia finally paused suddenly.

"I can go no further," she murmured.

"Are you so cold?"

"It is not that, for the exercise has warmed me, but I am utterly exhausted."

Hurst did not answer. For several seconds he looked at her in silence, and then turned his gaze toward the bleak heavens.

"Thar is one hope," he finally said. "Ef by any chance we hev wandered nigh ther village, ther lights may be visible. I say ef we're nigh, fur nobody kin see fur in this drivin' snow. Hyar's a cliff up above us, an' I'll climb up an' see what I kin see. You wait hyar, an' I'll soon be back. Hyar's a rock in ther shelter o' ther cliff—set down hyar."

He had led her to the place with rough kindness, and she sunk apathetically down.

"You won't be afraid?" he added.

"No, no. Go on."

He started, but came back after going a few steps.

"Don't let ther cold get ther best on ye. After a little, you had better git up an' stir around a bit. See?"

"Yes. I shall do very well."

"Don't git impatient, either. That cliff will be an ugly thing ter climb, an' it'll be hard work, but I'll come back ez soon ez I kin. I'll see ye safe out o' this."

Once more he turned away, looked reluctantly back once, and then disappeared in the whirling snow and the night. Lucia scarcely heeded his going, for she was in a dangerously indifferent state. She had made every effort before giving up, and now felt utterly wearied out and discouraged.

As Hurst had said, she was somewhat protected from the wind, but she still felt the cold intensely, and, after a little while, she realized that she was in danger of freezing. Her energies returned, and she arose and began to walk back and forth.

Thus she waited for Hurst to come back—waited at first patiently, and then with a growing fear that something was wrong. Why was he so long away? True, the cliff would be hard to climb, as he had said—it rose high above her head and looked grim and formidable—but it seemed as though a long time had elapsed. What had become of him? She felt able to go on now and—

Suddenly she started back in alarm.

What was that sound which had reached her ears, rising above the wailing of the wind? It might have been a panther's scream, but to her it seemed more like a human cry of pain or terror.

"What was it?"

She whispered the inquiry, crouching back in the shelter of the cliff and trembling like a leaf. A great fear had fallen upon her; a fear such as only the vague and indefinite can arouse. That cry—who had uttered it?—what had been the cause?

After a little while she grew bolder, and she felt that a duty lay before her. Harm might have come to her protector, and she was standing there in idleness. In a moment her resolution was taken. She would go toward the place from whence the cry had sounded, hoping that her course was for the best.

She started, passing down the gulch. At first it bore away too far to the right, but, further on, it turned to the left, thus describing a half-circle, and she found herself moving toward the desired locality. Now, however, she began to have doubts as to the wisdom of leaving her former station. She had disobeyed Hurst's di-

rections and might become hopelessly lost from him.

Still she went on, stumbling over the rocks and exposed to the full sweep of the wind, but once more her ears were saluted with a new and startling sound.

What was it? It seemed strangely like a human groan, yet who could be there? Who would willingly stay in the bleak gulch? Ha! something stirred in the snow, and again sounded a groan—there was now no mistake.

Lucia sprang forward, and there, half-covered by the snow, she saw the form of a man. Who it was she could not have told to save her life, but a voice arose sharply:

"It's you—it's you—you've come! Thank God, you hev come afore I die!"

It was the voice of Hurst, and Lucia caught at one of the hands fluttering feebly above his breast. It was cold as ice; she believed it already frozen.

"I fell from ther cliff," he went on. "Ther way was dark an' ther rocks slip'ry, an' I went over."

"Are you badly hurt, poor fellow?"

"I'm dyin'!"

"No, no; don't say that."

"It's true. I fell a hundred feet clear, and every bone is broke in my body. I'm a dead man!"

"Oh! no, it can't be as bad as that—you shall not die. Tell me what to do—you who have been so kind shall not perish thus."

"Me kind? Oh! gal, gal, you don't know what you say; you don't know how bad I am!"

"At least, you have been kind to me."

"No, I ain't—you don't know. Gal, I'm a dyin' man, so hearken ter me. You never'd been in this fix only fur me. Don't say I'm kind, fur 'twas only arter I found we was lost that my conscience smote me an' I tried ter undo ther damage. I agreed ter take ye whar they said, an' I meant ter do it, but I wouldn't till they swore no harm should come ter you. And now you've got ter die in this storm—oh! oh! it's too hard, too hard!"

Brokenly, pitifully these words fell from his lips, the last almost like the sobbing of a child, but Lucia heeded only those she thought most important.

"Who are you talking about—Draper?" she asked.

"No, no; I never seen him. 'Twas yer enemies, gal, your enemies. They was workin' ag'in' Draper, whoever he is; an' I was to lure ye ter them in ther mountains. Oh! I didn't mean ter do ez bad ez this—an' now I'm dyin', an' you're alone in ther mountains. Oh! I'm almost gone! Say—that—you—forgive—me!"

Slowly, painfully, gaspingly came the words, and he clung wildly to her hand, chilling it with his own.

"I forgive you," Lucia solemnly replied.

"Forgive—"

And with the words on his lips he fell back, and the wind shrieked even more wildly down the gulch.

"Dead!" said Lucia, in a husky whisper, as the pitiless snow fell on them both. "Dead! My only protector is gone, and I—I am left to die alone on the mountain!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOST LUCIA.

THERE was alarm at Bullion Bar.

Another day had dawned, but the weather had undergone a change. Snow no longer fell, and the rigor of the air had abated. Just when the change took place, nobody knew, but when the people arose in the morning rain was pouring down in a very lively way. The old inhabitants nodded their heads sagely, and said:

"The back-bone o' winter is broke. Look out fur freshets now."

They knew whereof they spoke. When the snows melted they generally went with a rush, and every canyon and gulch of the mountain was turned to a river-bed through which a torrent of water went roaring madly. There was never danger at the Bar, for, though Black Run became a mad race-course, its bold banks were sufficient to keep the water in place.

Consequently it was with pleasure, rather than apprehension, that symptoms were now seen that the snow was about to leave. The water might bowl and dash through the gulches as it saw fit, but Bullion Bar could serenely toast its shins before a good fire and let it go.

So thought the citizens, but, suddenly, a new cry ran through the town. A woman was believed to be lost on the mountain.

The Brothertons had given the alarm, and their story was to the effect that Lucia was missing; that she had not occupied her room the previous night; and, from the fact that Adam had seen her near the outskirts of the village the previous evening after dark, it was believed that she had been lost and caught in the storm.

Bullion Bar was at once excited. No person there was more popular than Lucia Brotherton, and a kinder feeling had always been reserved for her because she had been, as nearly all believed, wronged out of Montana Mill.

When it was announced that she was in danger, all the Bar rallied to get particulars, and the hardy men came prepared for work.

Rufus and Adam were questioned until they were almost driven wild, but the former's sagacity was their bulwark now. Foreseeing these questions, he had told his son in advance to plead ignorance on all points save one—they were merely to say that Lucia had acted peculiarly of late, and they feared that she had wandered away in a state of mental aberration.

"It don't make no great difference now," said Sol Slade, an old miner, as he looked up at the mountains; "her troubles are over."

"Don't say that!" implored Rufus, brushing his hand across his eyes.

"Fact, pard. It was colder than Greenland last night till ther sudden change, an', with ther snow comin' down ez it did, she had no show at all. I'm mighty sorry, but you kin count ther gal as dead."

"We'll do nothin' o' ther sort," said Lot Peterson, brusquely. "She was a gal o' uncommon sound sense, an' she would find some way o' savin' herself."

"But she was crazy, they say."

"I don't keer a cuss ef she was. Some folks know more when they're crazy than others do when they're in their right mind," retorted Lot.

"Lord knows I hope she's all right."

"A s'archin'-party must go to find her at once," Peterson pursued. "Who's with me?"

"I be," Slade quickly answered.

And every man in the crowd added his voice emphatically, and preparations were at once begun. One of the most agreeable features of the case was the arrival of the entire force from Montana Mill. Stamford had promptly closed the place when he heard the news, asking the workmen to join in the search and apply to him for their regular pay.

This, of course, raised him in the general estimation. He had known it would, and acted accordingly.

One man of his force did not appear with the rest. Paul Redgrave was not to be seen—a fact which was commented upon in terms not complimentary to him.

It did not take a great while to make the start, and off went the party in a body. Few were sanguine, and if Sol Slade had given his opinion, he would have said their work was wholly useless. The soft snow would render their progress difficult everywhere, while the temporary rivers which filled the gulches would cripple their every effort.

Add to this the fact that the girl was probably dead, and her body either covered by the snow or carried away by the torrent, and it seemed a hopeless quest.

The obstacles he had foreseen were soon encountered, but they struggled on manfully and gradually neared the higher ground. Then, however, the streams in the gulches became a great annoyance; they were forced to keep to the high ground between these passes, and compelled to take courses which made their progress devious and slow.

It is doubtful if there was a man in the whole party who had any hope of even finding the lost girl's body, though Lot Peterson stubbornly insisted that she would be found alive.

But where were they to seek? Three hundred acres of this wild country lay on their side of the mountain, and not a clew remained to guide the search.

Rufus Brotherton had been excusable on account of his age, but Adam was along, and he persistently called attention to one locality.

This, he declared, had once been Lucia's favorite resort in summer, and even in her mental aberration she was likely to seek the place again. Here, again, was the cunning of Rufus shown.

He and Adam knew what they were about, though they dared not give their real reason for believing her to be near that spot.

Hour after hour the searchers struggled on, wading through the soft snow, slipping over rocks, fording small streams and wandering by impassable ones. Rain had ceased to fall, but the day had grown warm and the melting snow seemed to suffer no check. The angry floods which swept through canyon and gulch were constantly reinforced, and in their wild race over the rocks were churned to white foam.

At noon nearly half the party found themselves on an elevated area which was like a table. They had gone on until it came to a point, barring their way. Fifty feet below roared the flood which came down a broad canyon and there divided into halves, shooting along a narrower course on each side of the plateau.

Here they halted for dinner, and, while thus occupied, noticed that the other division of their party was on the opposite side of the western gulch which, at that point, had a somewhat lower wall.

During this time, too, Sol was seen to look earnestly across and then speak.

"See hyar, pards, ain't that Redgrave over thar?"

"Whar?"

"Not with ther others—a hundred yards below them."

All looked, and then one man added:

"Yes, that's him. So he's with ther searchers arter all."

"Come ter exult over us," Lot Peterson bitterly said.

"He don't look very much pleased."

"Who ever seen him look like anything but a pirate?"

"He's a bad one," Sol admitted.

"This last tragedy lays at his door," Peterson declared. "I shall always b'lieve ef he'd stood by ther Brothertons as he ought ter, they'd never lost Montana Mill. He was ther king-pin thar, an' ther case went ez he sided. Wal, I hope he's happy now—ther death o' Horace Brotherton an' Lucia both lays at his door."

"Somebody pop him over," suggested a miner, indifferently. "He'd make a good target now."

"Too poor game to waste lead on."

Unconscious of these uncomplimentary remarks, Paul Redgrave sat on the verge of the cliff and looked over into the whirling waters. It was the first time he had been seen by the searchers, and he showed no inclination to join them now. Those nearest could see that his face was as somber as ever, but no one could say of what he was thinking as he sat grimly on the rock.

Dinner was finished and Sol Slade's party arose preparatory to going on.

"Wich we could cross the kenyon," Sol said.

"That's impossible."

"Yas: we can't bridge it, an' no human can live in that flood."

They still stood there when one of the party added:

"Thar's a tree comin' down."

It was an unusual circumstance. The mountain was sparsely wooded, and the water almost free from timber. So all looked at this lone tree with languid interest.

But suddenly Sol uttered a cry.

"Great Scott! look there, boys!"

He was pointing to the tree, and as the other looked more closely a deep hush fell upon the crowd. There was more there than they had seen at first; at one point a dark object arose above the trunk of the tree, and they stared in utter amazement as they saw that it was a woman clinging to it and riding with the flood.

More than this, some of them recognized her.

"Lucia Brotherton!" gasped Peterson.

Yes, she it was, and still alive, but menaced by a peril which made even those hardy men shudder.

The tree to which she clung was in the grasp of the torrent and was being driven helplessly along. Some peculiarity of its shape caused it to keep a general direction with the river, but it was borne like a feather. On it went with the angry water foaming over it, here pitching over a fall, there striking sullenly against the jagged rocks which dotted the bed of the canyon.

"She's doomed!" said Sol Slade.

"I'll give a hundred dollars ter him who'll jump over an' save her," said Peterson.

No one answered.

"Five hundred," he added.

"It's sure death," said Slade.

"Ain't ther a man who dares risk his life fur a woman?"

"Jump yerself, Lot Peterson!" some one retorted.

Lot shrunk back. The leap seemed like sure death, and even if it should prove otherwise it would be a madman who would defy the torrent. As Sol Slade had said, it seemed sure death. Lot looked appealingly toward the men on the opposite side of the canyon. Was there no one to save her?

Lucia saw them and lifted her hands appealingly. Perhaps she called for help, but no cry could reach them in the roar of the flood. The gesture cut to their hearts, but, though they were men long used to danger, not one dared go to her aid.

It seemed sure, and useless, suicide.

And now the tree sweeps past them. Whirling about as the water strikes mid-current at a point where it is dashed from a projection of rock, the tree goes on and bears its burden to destruction.

Instinctively Lot Peterson's gaze wanders to the lost man on the rocks—to Redgrave, the renegade.

The man is standing erect now, his own gaze fixed on the helpless voyager. His face looks strangely white, and he stares down as though he sees a ghost. Lot wonders, even now, if the traitor's conscience smites him at last.

But—great heavens! what is the man about? His hat and coat are dashed to the ground—he hurries back several feet—then, turning, runs forward to the brink and shoots into the air like an acrobat. Out—out—directly in the track of the log.

It is a mad leap. He goes to fall in the boiling flood, and all will soon be over with him. Surely his senses have deserted him, and he seeks a grave in the canyon.

He is there. He strikes the water with a great splash, shoots under the surface, and now the frothing torrent rolls resistlessly over him.

CHAPTER XIX.

TOGETHER IN LIFE OR DEATH.

A GIANT tree sweeping along with the flood; a woman clinging to its branches with a face white and despairing; a man struggling with the whirling waters, striking out bravely with his strong arms, yet seeming like a feather in the grasp of a giant—such was the picture.

The man was in the path of the tree, and as it bore down upon him it seemed that nothing could save him from being crushed by it, but the woman saw a face turned toward her with unwavering determination expressed upon it, and his eyes were as keen as though all the chances were in his favor.

Nearer, nearer yet.

The crisis was at hand.

The tree swept upon him, but he threw out one arm and grasped a branch. Then for a moment he was submerged by the water, there was a struggle, he reappeared and then—he lay upon the log, drenched, panting, breathless.

Lucia Brotherton looked, and then wonder fell upon her. She had seen the dangerous leap and thought it most heroic, but it was a startling surprise when she saw who had risked his life for her.

Redgrave, the Renegade.

The tree swept on, but she could only look in silence and wonder. Why had this man who had ruined her life risk his own in her behalf?

He seemed nearly exhausted, but, after a pause, sat erect and looked at her as quietly as though nothing unusual was occurring.

"I hope you don't object to my company, Miss Brotherton," he observed.

Lucia could only look at him in amazed silence.

"I thought perhaps I could help you," he added.

"You have sacrificed your own life."

"I think not."

"What is man's strength compared to this flood?"

"There is a Power stronger than the flood," Redgrave calmly answered. "Are you injured?"

"No."

"Then, perhaps, you will excuse me, when opportunity occurs, if I help you ashore?"

"Paul Redgrave, why will you talk folly? You have risked your life for mine—I always knew you were brave—so why spoil your record with empty talk."

"I didn't know whether you would accept my aid."

"Why not?"

"Well, because—"

He looked off uneasily at the beetling cliffs.

"What will a person not do when life is at stake?" Lucia added.

Redgrave's face brightened perceptibly.

"I'll save you then."

"How can you? Can you swim this flood?"

"Not here."

"Well, the end will be that we shall be dashed to pieces against some cliff. I have studied it out."

"For once you are wrong. We shall escape."

This statement was very quietly made, as though it was the most matter-of-fact affair in the world, and then Redgrave turned and looked ahead along their course.

Whatever he believed, Lucia had expressed the real state of affairs when she mentioned the danger of being crushed against a cliff. Their course was nearly always curving, and it only remained to come upon a bend so abrupt that the tree would be driven against the rocks. If this happened, death seemed inevitable.

The formation of the tree was of vast value to them. The trunk was so heavy and misformed that it not only kept the tree in a direct line but, forming a sort of ballast prevented it from rolling. For awhile they might ride successfully, but it needed only one glance at the frothing torrent to tell how desperate were their chances of ultimate escape.

Silence reigned for several minutes on the log, during which time Lucia looked in wonder at her companion. He had never seemed more of a mystery than then. He had risked his life for her when Lot Peterson and her other friends shrunk back appalled by the danger, yet he was very apathetic now.

Seeing that he did not intend to speak, she again broke the silence.

"Paul?"

"Yes, Miss Brotherton?"

"We are liable to die at any moment?"

"I think not—"

"I said we were liable to die."

"That is true."

"Then let me say that if I have ever wronged you—"

"You never have," he serenely replied.

"I have said harsh things of you."

"Most of which were deserved."

"Surely, you don't plead guilty to all?"

"No. Circumstances led you to believe that I harmed Horace Brotherton. In this you were mistaken: I never did him an injury, and I wish he were alive now. But, Miss Brotherton, I am a scoundrel. Don't regret anything you have

said, for you have never said half enough. If there is anybody who deserves censure, it is I. Your analysis was quite correct."

He made this remarkable speech with unwavering frankness, yet with indifference, but Lucia's opinion rose in strong opposition.

"I don't believe it!" she declared.

"What?"

"You are not all bad, Paul Redgrave. I will not think it now. At the least you are a hero, and when a man risks his life as you have done, he must have strong elements of nobility in his nature. Don't make me think ill of you now; we are driving to death, and I want to feel that we don't die with bitterness in our hearts."

There was pathos in her voice and face, but Redgrave calmly replied:

"We will have a truce while we are in peril, and when we get out you can hate me as much as ever again. I prefer that you do so."

He turned away once more and seemed wholly interested in the course of the tree, but Lucia had almost forgotten their situation. She thought only of Redgrave. His last blunt sentence had raised a ripple of anger, but it soon died away. She would have given much at that moment to thoroughly understand him, but it was a hopeless task.

Finally she spoke again:

"How did they happen to come to my help?"

"They thought you might need help."

"I mean, who knew where I was?"

"I didn't think to ask."

"Did you care?"

"Oh! it was necessary in order to find you."

"Perhaps they acted on your advice?"

"No; I didn't give the matter any thought."

Lucia's face flushed. His cool indifference amounted almost to insult in her opinion, and she turned away resolved not to address him again. Realizing their danger, she had wished to die, if die they must, at peace with him, but under no circumstances would she take another step.

Redgrave's manner now became more alert, and it was plain that he had some scheme in his mind. The circuitous course of the stream had kept them among the rocks and canyons which formed the level before mentioned, often sweeping them back in a course parallel to the one they had just come, but they had gradually been working out of the "labyrinth," and were approaching a place where he knew life or death awaited them.

At that point the mountain descended abruptly, and the torrent, as he well remembered, went rushing madly down to join Black Run, often leaping over precipices from fifty to a hundred feet high.

If they went over one of these it meant sure death; he must contrive some way of escape before one of these falls was reached.

Suddenly he started, looked around as though to mark certain prominent points, and then turned to Lucia. His broad face had never looked firmer, stronger or more stubborn.

"The attempt must be made," he said. "I shall have to take you and swim for it."

"You can never battle with the torrent!"

"I must."

"What is ahead?"

"No less danger than here. We may as well make the attempt first as last. I am a strong swimmer, and I hope to place you safely on firm land."

"Are we approaching a fall?"

"Yes."

"And it is death to go over?"

"Yes."

They looked into each others' eyes with perfect calmness, but it was something more than bravery. Lucia saw the raging flood, felt that Redgrave could not possibly breast it, and gave up all hope. His calmness was that of one who fixes his mind on another world and another life. She did not fear to pass the dividing-line. Her life had been as blameless as that of most women, and she felt it was well that she should die with Paul Redgrave.

He broke in on her meditations.

"Come!" he said, briefly.

Their hands met, and he gave her a few brief directions. His would be a wild struggle for life, and she must not hamper his movements. She heard and promised obedience, and they were ready for the attempt.

For a moment they looked into each others' eyes in silence. There was a world in that glance. Even Redgrave's face had softened. Alicia was not between them then; they had forgotten her in the presence of the shadow of death. There was a solemnity and holiness in the situation which amounted to grandeur.

Then he clasped her in his arms and prepared for the great effort. A few moment would settle all; the struggle would be short, and would end in life or death.

Redgrave scanned the bank with keen, dauntless eyes, and then gathered all his energy for the great effort. Another moment and the log was shooting ahead without an occupant; Redgrave and Lucia were fighting the flood.

She had given up all hope, and the raging water served to confuse her, but she could not be wholly insensible to the great fight he was making. If she lived beyond that day she

would never forget it. The water foamed over them, and they seemed in a giant's grasp, but Redgrave never ceased his efforts. He had said he was a strong swimmer, and he proved it then. It was a royal battle, and he was making amends for a multitude of sins.

He had selected the landing-place before taking to the water, and given himself a good deal of time to make it. He knew how the torrent would inevitably carry him down the stream, and his one hope was of making enough headway toward land so that they would be cast upon the point, not carried past.

If the latter happened both he and Lucia were doomed—they would go over the falls, and that was sure death.

Unseen by them several men were running toward the point, among them Lot Peterson. The crooked, doubling course run by the tree had enabled them to near outstrip it, by taking a direct line, and they were now witnesses of this great fight, though powerless to help.

"He'll never make it," said Lot, in an agony of fear. "They're bound ter go over, an' Lucia is doomed."

"By ther Old Nick, he's makin' a game fight, though!" Sol Slade admiringly cried.

"Yas, but it's no use; no human kin stem that tide. Oh! oh!—see!—they've been driven past ther p'int. They're doomed!"

CHAPTER XX.

A TANGLED WEB.

REDGRAVE saw the danger. Desperate as his efforts had been it seemed that they would miss the point, and his strength was failing him. He and Lucia seemed doomed to die together. To die? Never, never!

"I have work to do!" he hissed, through his teeth, and then seemed to become a Titan.

Once more his limbs struck the water fiercely; the water was dashed back, and he and his burden seemed almost to rise from the stream. A heroic, a gallant fight! The odds were against him—terribly against him—but he never wavered.

On, on! A moment of suspense, of doubt, and then—they were hurled upon the firm land, and the flood went roaring by as though in wrath at losing its prey.

It was lost, for Redgrave partially arose, staggered forward a few steps and placed Lucia where she was safe, and then dropped exhausted to the ground.

Lot Peterson rushed up and, disregarding the fact that he was only a servant of the rescued girl, caught her in his arms and shouted his joy like a madman.

No one was calm for awhile, and Sol Slade danced a jig in his joy, but when Lucia had repeatedly assured them that she was unhurt they remembered the man who had saved her.

Redgrave was lying without motion, but they saw there was blood on his face and Sol went to him with rough kindness. In that supreme hour they could well forget that he was a despised renegade. But his eyes suddenly unclosed and he arose.

"If you will excuse me now, I'll go and change my wet clothes. I fear I am taking cold."

It was a remarkable speech, and Slade was for a moment dumfounded.

"Great Scott!" he then cried, "strikes me you're mighty afeard o' a cold, when you've jest resked your life whar you had only one chance in a hundred."

"I was foolish to do so," said Redgrave, looking at the torrent.

"Why, man, you saved ther gal."

"I know, but I've bruised myself in several places."

"He wiped away the blood, while Sol gazed at him and muttered under his breath:

"Crazy as a March hare!"

Then he added:

"Are you much hurt?"

"There's a bad bruise on my forehead."

"It ain't bigger'n a cent. See hyar, man, be you pokin' fun at us? No man does ther act you've done an' then mourns over a bruise. Be you jokin'?"

Redgrave looked scowlingly at the speaker and then made an angry gesture.

"You show very poor taste," he said, curtly, and was hurrying away when Lucia called to him.

"Mr. Redgrave, I have not thanked you yet for saving my life," she began in a trembling voice, but he brusquely interrupted:

"It's of no consequence."

"Do you mean that my life is of no consequence?"

"I may be to you."

Even then Lucia flushed at the pointed rudeness. It seemed to say that he cared nothing about the matter, and was wholly indifferent. It was a blow at her most sacred feelings at a time when her heart was full of gratitude toward him.

"At least," she said, gravely, "I may thank you, and I do so most earnestly. Your heroism surpasses anything I have ever seen."

Redgrave nodded shortly.

"You're welcome," he said, tersely, and then turned and strode away.

"Crazy as a March hare!" repeated Sol Slade.

"Not much," replied another man who, having once been a medical student, was considered an authority in such matters. "His head is as well balanced as yours or mine, but I must say he has a queer way."

"A mighty queer way!" Sol dryly added.

Lucia was saved, and the word soon spread to all the searchers, who collected and escorted her back to the Bar. Only Redgrave was gone, and, as some one observed, he and his morose face would have been a kill-joy if he had been present.

It was a happy home-coming, and when the men left the girl at her own home they did so with hearty cheers which showed what a hold she had upon their hearts. Then she was left with her uncle and cousin. Adam had been very attentive to her on the mountain, and Rufus received her with tearful eyes and a caress, but in the heart of each was a fear which made them nervous and ill at ease.

They were very anxious to hear her story.

Of course her first care was to do what she could to ward off a cold and worse ills. Considering what she had been through she was in wonderfully good condition, but the danger was not over.

The true story of her adventures she had no intention of telling them, for she did not forget the last words which Hurst had spoken to her. He said that he had been sent by her enemies—and they were not Draper—to decoy her somewhere, and if Draper had told the truth those enemies might be her uncle and Adam.

She had decided to tell a fictitious story, and to make it as simple as possible, and this she did.

Briefly expressed, this is what she told: A sudden whim had sent her to the hills to enjoy the wild, wintry scenery; the storm had come up, covering her trail, and she had become lost; and she had taken refuge in a cave until driven out by the flood, when she took to the tree and had her wild ride.

As she told this story at length she secretly watched her companions, and did not fail to see the significant glances which passed between them. She decided that it was they who hired Hurst to decoy her, and that they believed her account to be a fiction, but she went on serenely to the end, giving it an air of plausibility.

When it was told she retired to secure much-needed rest, but it was some time before she slept. She believed that she must now regard Rufus and his son as her enemies, and she seemed hemmed in with trouble. Only Lot Peterson could be relied upon as her friend, and he was so outspoken and indiscreet that he was liable to do more harm than good.

Truly, she was beset with danger on all hands.

Her mind, too, reviewed the real scenes through which she had passed, up to and after the time when Hurst fell from the cliff.

A mere chance had saved her then. She would have perished in the canyon, but, as Hurst dropped back, apparently dead, she shrunk back against the cliff and discovered an opening in its face. She investigated and found it a small cave.

Believing that Hurst was not yet dead, she dragged him into the cave. Then, despite what he had said to the contrary, she found a match in his pocket. She lit it and made a welcome discovery.

The cave had sometime been occupied, and fuel enough remained of a former supply to save her now. She managed to get a fire, and her life was saved. She crouched by the blaze all night, listening to the storm outside.

Hurst was not dead, but he did not again recover consciousness. At times he lay in a stupor; then he would partially arouse and moan and mutter in a vague way.

It was a night never to be forgotten.

With the coming of day came the rain, and she saw it rise higher and higher until it became clear that her cave was to be flooded. She waited until her life was in danger, and the last chance gone, and then managed to reach the tree.

Of course she could do nothing for Hurst, and as the cave was fast filling when she left, she was obliged to give him up for dead. Besides, she had no doubt that his injuries were fatal.

All these scenes passed panorama-like before her eyes again, but she succumbed at last and slept.

Meanwhile Rufus and his son were having an earnest, troubled discussion in the lower part of the house. They it was who sent Hurst to decoy Lucia, and they had kept her away from Draper by the simple artifice of setting her watch and all the other time-pieces ahead, but their own schemes had failed.

Where was Hurst? Had he utterly failed to find Lucia, or had he found her and then failed as a decoy? Their scheme had included a rough experience for her which should make her think Draper a fraud and villain, and they shivered even then as they remembered how they had waited in the cold for those who never came.

And how was it now?

Was a sword suspended above their heads?

The fact that Lucia was plainly romancing on certain points led them to fear her whole story was false; that Hurst had proved false to them; and that she knew enough to ruin them. It was an ugly outlook for them, and they were decidedly ill at ease. Indeed, Adam once spoke of giving up the fight and fleeing from Bullion Bar, but Rufus would not hear to this.

If all was not already lost, he believed he could find a way of wresting victory from the jaws of defeat.

His counsel prevailed, and they finally retired resolved to fight the battle out, win or lose.

Lucia Brotherton slept, but her rest had become disturbed. What was that noise she heard! She dreamed, and imagined that she was again in the cave; that she had put up a wooden door, and the rain was pounding upon it and demanding admittance.

Rap! rap! rap!

What was she to do? The storm was pitiless; would force an entrance, and her life would soon go out before its touch.

Rap! rap! rap!

Again the sound. She stirred and opened her eyes. The clock struck twelve.

"It was only that," she murmured, with a sleeper's want of logic.

Rap! rap! rap!

Still the sound, and this time she knew it was a tapping at the window. She partially arose, hesitated, then sprang to the floor and threw on her dress. This done she went boldly to the window just as the rap sounded again. She raised the curtain, and there, just outside the window, was a head framed in gray hair and beard which she recognized at once. It was the aged stranger, Draper.

He held up one hand with a gesture to request silence, and she unhesitatingly raised the window.

He spoke quickly.

"Our plans miscarried, but it was no fault of mine. I waited an hour at the appointed place."

"And I," answered Lucia, "found a man there who pretended to come from you, said you were sick and pretended to guide me to you, but we both became lost and he fell from a cliff and killed himself."

"Another trick of Rufus Brotherton!" Draper exclaimed. "Beware of that man as you value your life and happiness. He is as dangerous a serpent. Did you have a hard time in the mountains?"

"I did, and should have lost my life only for one man's herosim. But that is past now. What have you to tell me?"

"Something better than I thought five hours ago. I have said that Rufus Brotherton can produce no one who knows where Wells, your missing witness, is. I say so now. But I can tell you where he is."

"Wells?"

"Yes."

"Then, in mercy's name, tell me."

"A few days ago he was in Denver. Now he is on his way here."

"Do you know this to be a fact?" Lucia asked, with sudden excitement.

"Yes. He knows his testimony is wanted, and is coming to give it."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Whether he is an honest man I don't know, but he asserts that he can, and will, save Montana Mill for you. Watch for him; he may arrive at any moment."

"Did he see my advertisement?"

"No. His discovery is due to me."

"I thank you a thousand times, and now, who are you who has so nobly come to my aid?"

"I am a simple old man, but one who wishes justice done. If I can help you to recover Montana Mill it shall be yours. But say nothing about this; I wish to remain unknown and unseen for awhile; so do not mention me even to Peterson."

"Have I ever seen you before? It almost seems that your voice is familiar."

"You are mistaken; I am an utter stranger to you. I knew your father, however, and for his sake, and yours, all my efforts will be used in your behalf. Say no more now, but if you get a message from me, heed it. I shall continue to work for you, and I'll see that Wells don't get lost again. Depend on me, and—no, I can't stop longer."

The mysterious old man was hurrying down his ladder as he spoke. Once at the bottom he shouldered it and moved away, leaving Lucia in a confused, wondering, uncertain yet hopeful, state of mind.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALICIA MENTIONS ARSENIC.

MEN spoke better of Paul Redgrave after that day. Renegade he might be, and, perhaps, knowing to how Horace Brotherton died, but he had certainly done a most heroic deed. There had been brave men in the party who would have left Lucia to drown, and they proved their bravery in a measure by giving Redgrave full credit.

He had risked his life where he had no more than one chance in a hundred, and they did not hesitate to sound his praises.

If he noticed the new respect with which people looked at him he gave no sign. Moving about his work as usual he never referred to the matter except when addressed, and then answered as briefly as possible.

He would not be made a hero.

One person only gave him no credit. This was Alicia. This beautiful young woman was developing into a virago. Nothing that Paul did satisfied her—she not only complained of his treatment of her, but his dress, movements and expression came in for a share of her disapproval.

She posed for a martyr, but fell just far enough short to be a virago. Even Stamford found life unpleasant in her presence, yet, serenely unconscious of her real position, she always looked to Mr. Bradlock Cowles for approval when she scolded. And he wore an expression of deep sympathy, she thought.

When Alicia knew that her husband had saved Lucia's life she hailed it as new abuse of her, and proof that he loved Lucia, and there was music in the air the day after that event.

Paul escaped it all by leaving the house after supper, and Stamford retired to the room he called his study. Mrs. Redgrave and Cowles were thus left together again, and the bookkeeper believed the time was ripe for investigation.

He had not forgotten his intention of making a cat's-paw of Alicia, and he believed he was fast gaining a hold over her.

Not caring to hear more about Redgrave's shortcomings, he turned the conversation into other channels and gradually approached the subject nearest his mind.

"You are an only child, I think you said, Mrs. Redgrave?"

"Yes, Mr. Cowles."

"Do your relatives live in the West?"

"I don't know that I have any."

"Was your father also an only child?"

"He had a brother, but he was a worthless fellow and not really one of the family."

"Dead now, I infer?"

"Yes, years ago."

Cowles glanced toward the other room. Stamford was dangerously near, and he would not have him overhear this conversation for any money.

"Not married, I suppose?"

"On the contrary, he was, and had one child, a son. I suppose the boy is now alive; at least, I don't know that he is dead. He is, if alive, a man now."

Cowles shaded his face with his hand. He thought it possible that his expression might seem a trifle eager.

"Did you ever see him?"

"No, and I don't want to."

"Are you afraid he is like his father?"

"No."

"May I ask your reason?"

He spoke very blandly, for he saw that, for the first time, Alicia seemed to think the subject something more than trivial. She glanced from her work to his face now, but it was so careless and pleasant that she was reassured. She felt that she was indiscreet, but was impelled to say more.

"Well, the fact is, I suppose some of the Stamford property would belong to him if he was alive and should claim it. I say 'if alive,' for there was a rumor that he died when a child."

"I suppose your father knew different?"

"I believe he did, but he is not a communicative man. He keeps his own secrets, and keeps them in his safe. He has papers in that which would tell a good many stories, I dare say."

Again Bradlock Cowles's eyes sparkled. He had heard of this safe before—a strictly private one—but he mentally thanked the gossiping woman for mentioning it.

"I really believe," he said, in his airiest manner, "that I should be tempted to examine them, if I were you."

"Ah! but he alone knows the combination that will open it."

"And the secret of your uncle's son is locked up there like a royal diamond, eh?"

"I suspect so: I don't know. Father has never seemed willing to talk on the subject—I presume he was very much ashamed of his worthless brother."

"No doubt."

"I believe there was actually a will made by my grandfather by which all the money went to the other son—the mean old man had become angry at father about something—but he died and lost it."

"Seems that he did one good thing, anyhow."

"Yes."

"Your father is reckless to keep any papers bearing on the subject. By and by, when he's dead, the other heirs may appear and wrest the fortune from you just by means of these same papers."

Alice started.

"I never thought of that."

"You ought to destroy those papers," blandly pursued Mr. Cowles.

"It would be useless to speak to father."

"Do it unknown to him."

"Ah! but how am I to unlock the safe?"

"Possibly I could help you. Of course I say

this in privacy to you, for I work for Mr. Stamford. If I should help you it would be a personal favor to you, to protect you from possible loss. I must also ask you to protect me by not mentioning what I say."

"You can rely upon me, Mr. Cowles, and I highly appreciate your kindness. I will consider how the papers can be got at and let you know the result. I never thought how careless it was to keep them. I thank you for your kind offer, Mr. Cowles."

"I am glad to help you, Mrs. Redgrave."

Their eyes met, and then Alicia looked away. The wily bookkeeper noticed that she had grown suddenly thoughtful, and he let her have ample time. He felt that his influence over her was greater than that of any one else, and he hoped much from it.

"Mr. Cowles," she resumed, after a pause, "do the rats trouble you much at night?"

"The rats? I haven't heard any."

"Indeed! They are very thick in the house."

"You should banish them, then—put out a royal decree, as it were."

"I have been thinking of getting arsenic to kill them. Arsenic is good, isn't it?"

She raised her gaze to his face, but almost immediately looked down again. Cowles was glad she did. Her question, and the expression in her eyes, had put an idea into his mind which startled him, and he felt sure that his face betrayed him then.

"Arsenic is said to be excellent," he slowly replied.

"Don't you think it would be as good as anything?"

"Yes."

"I am not acquainted with the nature or appearance of it. Is it a liquid or powder?"

"A powder."

"Where can I get it?"

"Probably Doctor Rowe has it, but I am not sure you could get any from him. It is a dangerous thing to handle, and those who sell are supposed to be careful as to how it is to be used."

Alicia looked up again. If ever Cowles had seen a devil in a person's eyes, it was in hers then. This time her gaze did not fall; she looked at him steadily.

"I should put it to good use," she said, steadily.

"I do not doubt it."

"Perhaps Doctor Rowe would sell more readily to a man than to a woman," she continued.

"If you really desire it," said Cowles, looking her full in the face, "I think it may be had."

"Could you get it?"

"I think so."

"If you will, I shall feel much indebted to you."

"It is certainly a pity that you should be troubled with rats, and I will help you."

"Thank you."

Her gaze fell for a moment, and then she looked up again.

"Since it is so dangerous, perhaps it would be as well that father know nothing about it," she added, in the same steady voice. "Suppose we have it as a secret between us two, and mention it to no other person."

"A very good idea."

"And you will get it for me?"

"With pleasure."

Alicia resumed her work, and there was silence for a moment. Cowles played mechanically with his watch-chain and looked at the woman before him. A beautiful face and shapely form were hers, but he believed he knew her mind at last. He had never been deceived as to her character, but the revelation made the facts stronger than he had suspected.

"I want a girl to help me about the house," abruptly resumed Mrs. Redgrave. "Can you suggest any one?"

Cowles stroked his mustache thoughtfully.

"I have one in my mind, but would recommend that I see her first. She might be hard to persuade."

"Please see her then, if she is one who will be faithful to my interests."

"She will, I am sure."

"When can you let me know?"

"I'll see her at noon to-morrow."

Alicia expressed herself satisfied with this arrangement, and then conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Stamford from the next room. Both were really glad to see him come. There was a perceptible awkwardness in their manner, and the presence of a third person was agreeable to them.

Cowles soon arose and went into the room the elder man had just left. He wanted to be free from questions, and free to think, and he was about to adopt the artifice of pretending to read.

Stamford had a small library in a "secretary" and he always kept the books carefully arranged. As Cowles approached them, he saw one, a pamphlet, which was out of place and lay on the others as though carelessly, or hastily, flung into the secretary.

He raised it with careless curiosity and saw that it was called "The Household Medical Guide." Evidently it had not been much of a

guide thus far to the Stamfords, for it did not seem to have been much read.

As he took it up, the leaves opened at one point, as though some person had lately been reading there and had pressed back the stiffly-bound pages. Cowles looked further. The book had opened at the beginning of a new chapter, and the title thereof stared him in the face with bold letters:

"EFFECT OF POISONS ON THE HUMAN SYSTEM."

He thrust the book quickly back into place, and, when he rejoined the group in the other room, he bore a copy of Tennyson's poems. In his own opinion he had selected something mild enough to offset the other book.

But when he was alone in his own room, his mind returned to the medical book, and his thoughts ran in this channel:

"The fair Alicia has been reading about poisons, as some one may find to his sorrow. Ah! Paul Redgrave, it was an evil day for you when you became a troublesome rat!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A CHANCE FOR SHARKEY'S GIRL.

THE following day Redgrave and Cowles were at the office as usual. The bookkeeper had never been more at his ease or more devoted to business. Circumstances made it necessary for him and Paul to have a long talk on business matters, and the employee was very polite, pleasant and attentive.

"He's a jewel," said Stamford to his partner, when they were alone.

"A faithful, capable man, it seems," Redgrave answered, and then plunged into work.

But he had never heard that there were rats in his house, nor did he know that Alicia had mentioned arsenic. He might not have trusted his bookkeeper quite so much if he had known all.

At noon, Cowles crossed the foot-bridge and started for Jake Sharkey's house. He was pleased to see the honest boatman just putting out in his craft, for he had no desire to meet him.

Reaching the house he caught sight of Bess inside, and opened the door and walked in without ceremony.

"Here I am again!" he announced, airily.

Bess turned suddenly, looked at him, and a peculiar expression flashed over her face. One would have said that it was joy, but it was gone before Cowles had much time to analyze it. She was her old self almost instantly, and her expression became far from inviting.

"Don't you know me?" he asked, as she said nothing.

"Yes," she tersely replied.

"Well, aren't you glad to see me?"

"Why should I be?"

"Because I am one of your best friends," he lightly replied, as he helped himself to a chair. "True, our acquaintance has been confined to one interview, but I, for one, was much impressed then. I admire you a good bit, Bessie."

"Rubbish!"

"It's a fact."

"Why don't you save your fine speeches for those who can appreciate them?"

"Because you are the only woman to whom I can conscientiously say as much."

"Do you take me for a fool?" Bess bitterly retorted.

"Not by any means, and he who says you are one is my enemy. Come, let us be friends, Bessie."

"I don't want any friends," she declared.

"I do. I want you for my friend. I don't know why you persist in trying to keep me away from you, and I won't be kept away. I admire you, and you ought to admire me out of sympathy, if nothing more."

He coolly tipped his chair back against the wall, crossed his legs, and looked at her with his sunniest smile.

"Come, Bessie, be reasonable," he added.

"My name is Bess," was the curt reply.

"It don't fit. Names should always fit. Won't you allow me to call you Bessie?"

The girl turned abruptly and stood only a few feet away, looking him full in the face. Her expression was moody, but it was more earnest than usual.

"I would like to know why you, a fine gentleman of the world, persist in talking to a girl like me," she said, with emphasis. "I am poor, humble, ignorant and despised by the grand folks. I know nothing about the fine world. My world has been the rough towns of the Far West. You have lived in cities, moved in good society, enjoyed advantages not given me, and the world, so called, is an open book to you. Why do you bring your talents to the cabin which shelters a creature like me?"

She had grown passionate toward the end, but the light, pleasant smile never left his face.

"Because I see in you a fine woman," he answered, promptly. "Cities and society are all well enough in their way, but they are not all. Give me a true heart like yours and I'll throw the world, so called, to the dogs."

"Bradlock, do you know who I am?"

"Tell me."

"I am Jake Sharkey's daughter."

"Well?"

"Even the people of Bullion Bar shun me as they would a leper."

"Then they are fools," Cowles quietly replied.

"You think, in your heart, as they do."

She spoke sullenly, bitterly, and his face suddenly grew grave.

"Bessie, you are in a mood no young person should fall into; you are morbid. This is a bad habit, and you should get rid of it. True, it is against you that you are Jake Sharkey's girl, but if you make a bold effort you can throw off the taint. Rouse, bestir yourself, turn over a new leaf. Cultivate cheerfulness, and thereby conquer the world which misuses you. The world? It's a cowardly cur, ready to bark at the heels of those who fear it, but as ready to cringe and fawn like a chastised dog when boldly faced. Bessie, there is good in you, whether you know it or not. Make that good felt, and—don't refuse the hand stretched out to help you!"

Was this Bradlock Cowles, the careless? His voice had grown grave, earnest and solemn, and he would have moved even one more worldly than the cabin girl.

She was moved—that was plain. His keen eyes noticed her quickened breathing, and her great eyes were darker than he had ever seen them before.

"Where is that helping hand?" she asked.

"Here! It is mine."

"How can you help me?"

"I can place you in the house of one of the best families of Bullion Bar, where you will have a chance to form yourself anew."

"What family?"

"Stamford's."

"I've heard of them."

She was silent for a moment, and then she slowly added:

"Of course I should go to work. Wouldn't they despise me?"

"No. I know something about them, and think I can safely say you would be well treated. I work in Stamford & Redgrave's mill, and board at their house. If you come, you and I will be members of the same family."

Bess blushed perceptibly; a proof of womanly feeling for which few would have given her credit. Then she turned abruptly away—perhaps to hide her face—but Cowles had read it already. He knew then, if he had not before, that he had gained an ascendancy over her which was all the stronger because no one else had any hold on her mind.

Finally she turned to him again.

"If I go there, what will be the result?"

"Your good, I'm sure."

"If I am misused I'll not bear it. I won't have it thrown in my face that I am Jake Sharkey's girl."

Once more her voice was fierce, but Cowles soothingly answered:

"No one will do it. They are too honorable for that!"

He believed that Stamford and Redgrave, whatever their shortcomings, would respect her enough for that, and Alicia would be kind through policy to one she needed in the delicate work ahead of her.

"I'll come!" abruptly announced the girl.

"Bravo! Now I am delighted, and I see you rising from the depths to stay out," said Cowles, his face radiant. "Rest assured, I'll help you all I can, and whoever calls me a friend can depend on me through thick and thin, sunshine and storm."

Bess did not reply, and, after a moment, Cowles thoughtfully continued:

"What will amiable Jacob say to your going?"

"He won't care."

"No?"

"He's got no love for me, and I rather think he will be glad to get rid of me."

"Then he'll have no one to mention his little eccentricities, eh?"

Bess made a quick gesture.

"Don't mention him!" she exclaimed.

"I won't," Cowles answered, but he made a mental resolve to soon get the girl to talking about her father. With the hold already gained upon her he believed it would be easy to make her go further, and there was great need of light upon the ways of the Black Shark.

The bookkeeper only paused to get Bess's promise that she would come to Stamford's early that evening, and then he went to Montana Mill. If he had been a man without a care, trouble or plot on his mind, he could not have been more diligent and sunny tempered than he was that afternoon.

Good management enabled him to be the first home at evening.

"Your domestic cometh this evening, Mrs. Redgrave," he said, airily.

"Who is she?" Alicia quickly asked.

"Miss Bess Sharkey."

"Great heavens!"

"Eh?"

"I can't have that creature in the house," Alicia declared, with holy horror.

"Bless you, yes you can. She's a good worker and small feeder, I'll bet. Just what you want."

"Do you know what her father is?"

"I have a vague idea that that amiable man is an unconscionable scoundrel, but we are not hiring him. The girl only needs a chance, and she will develop into a kinker. You should see her wield a broom!"

"You seem fascinated with her," Mrs. Redgrave suspiciously observed.

"Oh! oh! don't say that. Isn't she a Sharkey? Such women as she can work, but, between us two, I don't believe they have souls. Fascinated? Hardly! There are those in Bullion Bar whose shoes she is not worthy to lace. But as a domestic I believe she will be willing, faithful and—not too conscientious."

He looked full into Alicia's eyes at the last words, and her own gaze fell. There was a significance in his manner and speech which she understood, and she began to think Sharkey's girl would be a very desirable domestic.

"I'll see her," she murmured.

She did see her, and the result was that Bess came to the house the following morning to remain. She was just in time to act her part in the drama of intrigue and crime set on foot by fair-faced Alicia.

During the day she quite won her mistress's regard. True, she had never had any experience in a fine house, but she was willing to learn and did learn rapidly. She had come to Stamford's with the intention of doing her best, and was beginning well.

Alicia was very kind to her; so kind that, if Bess had been more experienced in the ways of the world, she might have wondered at it. Mrs. Redgrave knew how to be agreeable when she desired, and it might some time be of vital importance that Sharkey's girl thought well of her.

That evening Cowles took advantage of an opportunity to give Alicia a small package secretly.

"The rat poison," he said, carelessly.

"Did you get it of Doctor Rowe?" she asked, gingerly handling it.

"No. I had some myself in my trunk, and thought it a good deal better than to make the matter public."

"You did right."

"Of course I need not caution you to be very careful about using it."

They looked each other significantly in the eyes.

"I will be very careful," Alicia answered.

"I should be very sorry if negligence on your part led to your getting into trouble, Mrs. Redgrave."

"Would you, really?" she asked, faintly smiling.

"I should, indeed."

"For your sake, then, I will be careful," and with these words Alicia hid the deadly package in her pocket and turned away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. JACK WELLS.

THERE was a lull in proceedings at Brotherton's. As yet Lucia had not given an answer to Adam's proposal, and he and his father were on nettles. Lucia's manner puzzled and troubled them. They felt sure they had not heard the true story of her adventures on the mountain, and they feared the worst from this.

And what had become of Hurst?

The man had accepted their money and agreed to decoy her, and they felt sure he and the girl had met. What had been the result? What had become of Hurst? Why did he not appear and make his report? Had he turned traitor, confessed to Lucia, and put her on her guard?

Adam and Rufus worried themselves a good deal on these points, and waited for Lucia to speak with impatience.

She was not much more at ease. She felt that she was living like one on a volcano. Hurst had died without telling who had hired him to decoy her, but in her opinion suspicion pointed at Rufus and his son, and she feared some new attack. She watched in vain for Draper to reappear, determined to learn the truth when he did come.

The same day that Bess went to work at Stamford's, Lucia had a caller. Answering a rap at the door, she found a bluff-looking, red-faced man there who raised his old, dilapidated hat politely.

"Might this be Miss Lucia Brotherton?" he asked, in an off-hand manner.

"I am Miss Brotherton, sir."

"Good! This is who I be."

He extended a soiled bit of card-board, and she took it and glanced at the name upon it:

"MR. JACK WELLS."

Her face flushed, and then grew pale.

"Are you, indeed, the John Wells who sold Montana Mill to my father?" she asked.

"I'm him, mum, sure ez shootin'. Yes, sirree, I'm Jack Wells, Esquire; come all the way from Denver fur ter say that you are ther sole *bonus fide* owner o' Montana Mill an' ther seteries."

Lucia was trembling, but she made an effort to be calm, and asked Mr. Wells to enter. He did so, hat in hand, motioned her to a seat be-

fore he would sit down himself, and seemed anxious to act the gentleman. He was a large, jolly-looking man, and a man who gave the suggestion of much liquor stored away in his stomach.

"I have looked for you for a long time," said the girl, eying her visitor narrowly.

"It's a shame I didn't know it afore. I hev been ruralizin', an' only ketched onter yer want a bit ago. Gosh all flaxseed, mum, be they really tryin' ter eucher ye out o' ther mill?"

"They have done so already."

"Why did ye allow it?"

"We went to law, and they won the case."

"Tain't always safe ter go ter law. Justice is a better court ter appeal to. Ef a man is in ther wrong, an' ain't got no sort o' a case, let him go ter law an' his lawyer will lie him on ter victory; but ef he's got a good case, let him beware ther law. Ther law, mum, is a viper which stingeth like an adder an' biteth like a scorpion, ez ther poet says."

"We bought Montana Mill of you?" said Lucia, with a business air.

"You did, mum."

"And paid you?"

"Ev'ry cent."

"Can we hold it?"

"Ef you don't, you'll be foolish."

"I mean, legally. In a word, when you and your partner separated, did he buy your half, or did you buy his?"

"I bought his. Paid fur it, too, like a little man. Paid in gold-dust. Does that mis'ble Tom Eames dare ter say I didn't?"

"That is just what he does say."

"Mum, I hate ter be brash in a lady's presence, but Tom kin lie so that Andrew Washington's statue would turn pale."

"Can you prove that you bought his share? Have you any evidence, documentary or otherwise? Have you witnesses?"

"Two as good witnesses as ever breathed, but they were unlucky enough awhile ago ter hev a revolver argument, an' I planted some right handsome roses over their beds last spring. They bunk in a graveyard now, yer see."

"Then there are no living witnesses?"

"No."

"Have you any papers?"

"I've got ther deed Tom Eames gi'n me."

"Let me see it, please."

"I haven't it hyar. It's down in Leadville, but I hev sent fur it, an' you shall see it ez soon ez it shows up. Don't look skeptical: I've got that bit o' paper, an' you are goin' ter hev it. I'll prove Tom a liar, an' boost them interlopers on ther run."

Lucia had been watching Mr. Jack Wells closely, and she was not wholly pleased. He had a wonderful gift of speech and his words flowed right along. He talked too much to please her, and though he might be able to prove all he claimed, she had some doubt.

She felt that a wiser head than hers was needed.

"Will you go with me to my lawyer's?" she asked.

"With pleasure."

"One word, first. Do you know a man named Draper?"

"Yes. No, I never seen him, but he it was that got me here. Ye see I was 'way out in Dakota when a man found me. That man was one o' ther best detectives in ther West—Hendrickson was his name. Seems that a mighty big reward had been offered fur me, and so ther detective dropped all else an' hunted fur me. He found me, but he never seen his employer. Ther reward had been placed in a Denver bank, subject ter ther call o' ther successful man, by one Draper."

"Strange!" murmured Lucia.

"Relative o' yours, I take it."

"No."

"No? Wal, he slings ther gold-dust right lively in your cause, anyway."

"Have you any idea where he lives?"

"No. Does he live hyar?"

"I know no more than you."

"No? Wal, that's right odd. Queer chick, he is. He's mightily interested in ye, anyhow. He keeps himself hid, it seems, an' even ther detectives wa'n't allowed ter see him. His dust raised ther pile, though."

"I hope you will not mention him in Bullion Bar," Lucia continued, sorry that she had admitted as much to Mr. Jack Wells.

"You bet I won't! I got an extra X from Draper on condition that I never breathed his name ter nobody but you an' yer lawyer, an' I don't go back on an agreement clinched with a valler boy with Uncle Samivel's brand onter it. Nary time!"

Finding that nothing was to be learned from him, Lucia at once conducted him to Mr. Barlow's office. Her observing eyes soon discovered that the lawyer was not much more favorably impressed than she had been. Barlow had had experience enough to look suspiciously upon the man who talked a good deal. This was Mr. Jack Wells in a nutshell, and, though he might be all right, Barlow wished their witness was of a slightly different stamp.

Wells was very sanguine. In a day or two the deed and other papers would be along from

Leadville, and then Stamford would be ousted from Montana Mill almost without an effort.

As for Thomas Eames and his papers, Wells pronounced them forgeries and said that "Tom" was a liar of the first water. Indeed, he expressed a desire to "thump" Mr. Eames's head, and was impatient to go out and do it instantler.

Barlow scented danger at once. Eames was a quiet man who had made friends at the Bar, and if Wells went on the war-path he would surely turn sympathy from the Brotherton faction. Accordingly, he not only made Wells promise to keep the peace, but asked him to take an assumed name until the time came to announce the reopening of the great case.

At first the witness rebelled against this. He was Jack Wells, and was proud of it, and he wished to go out on the street and announce the fact, and be admired as the man who was going to "knock Stamford, Redgrave, Eames & Co. into a cocked hat," as he expressed it.

The lawyer promptly opposed all this, but did it with such skill that Wells hardly realized that he was being handled and subdued like an unruly horse. He agreed to take another name and remain unknown, and when Lucia added that it would be a personal favor to her, he declared with a deep bow that he would call himself William Kidd or Bluebeard, to oblige her, and would swear that he was the original.

Barlow would have been better satisfied if he could have completely isolated their witness, but asthis was impossible, he had to take the risk and let him go free.

He was accordingly dismissed.

"What do you think of him?" Lucia asked.

"He tells a confident story," was the guarded reply.

"That is no answer."

"Well, the case assumes a complicated aspect," Barlow thoughtfully assured. "If Wells produces his papers, and I think he can and will, we shall then have two deeds of the transaction between him and Eames. One is a forgery. Which? This is a matter for disinterested persons to decide, and I suspect that it will prove a tough nut to crack. I wish Wells was less demonstrative and boisterous; he talks too much, and such men never amount to much. The great question is, how will he affect a jury?"

"The old settlers of the Bar used to speak well of him."

"They were probably hail-fellows-well-met, I wish some of these men could be found—they must be. This new population knows neither Wells nor Eames. We must find some of their old-time companions and learn how they were rated in regard to character. But don't understand me as being doubtful. We have found our witness, and we reopen the case with the determination to succeed if success is possible."

"We must win!" Lucia declared.

"We will win."

Lucia was silent for a moment, thinking of Redgrave, the Renegade, and wondering how he would act if he thus lost all for which he had schemed and sold his honor. Barlow soon continued:

"How do you account for the way in which Wells was found? Who, and what, is this Draper?"

Lucia had decided to tell Barlow all she knew about the mysterious old man, and she did so, greatly to his astonishment. He was greatly perplexed when she asserted that she had never before heard of him.

"An old friend of your father, eh?" the lawyer slowly said. "And you never heard of him?"

"No."

"What motive can he have for keepin' incog?"

"That I can't surmise."

"I should suspect that he was an enemy trying to injure you, and alienating you from Rufus Brotherton and his son for interested motives, but I confess that I don't greatly admire your relatives."

"Somehow, I have faith in Draper."

"It certainly seems like a good piece of work to hunt up Wells, but I can't see why an honest man should keep himself unknown. I think it only fair that Mr. Draper should come out of his ambush, and we will contrive some way to make him show his hand."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE IRON HAND.

If Lawyer Barlow had been a frequenter of saloons, and had wandered into the principal one of Bullion Bar that evening, he might have formed even a poorer opinion of Mr. Jack Wells.

That gentleman ate his supper, smoked a cigar and then wandered to the saloon just mentioned. He went with the firm resolution of being prudent and wise, but he could not resist the temptation to seek a scene he had always found congenial to his nature.

Entering, he called for liquor and sat down to drink it. While thus engaged, he looked about and scanned the other customers. What he saw did not appear to please him, for he became gloomy, shook his head often and sighed heavily.

Then he sought to drown his sorrows by calling for another drink, and, finding this ineffectual, followed it with several other drinks. All the while his melancholy increased, and he sighed more lugubriously, until at last he could no longer restrain his feelings.

Arising, he approached a table where three men were seated.

"Gents," he said, "have you any objections to my settin' 'em up an' j'inin' you?"

As one man they hastened to say that they had not the slightest objection.

"I'm glad ter hear it; I really be, gents; for my heart is heavy, an' I need congenial company."

"Out o' luck?" asked one of his new friends.

"No, my luck was never better. I've struck a lead, an' I'm jest rollin' knee-deep in clover, but I am sad at heart, or tharabouts."

"Lost a pard?"

"Nary. I've simply come back to my ancestral halls an' found ther light gone out. Gents, look about on this scene o' hilarity. Thar is much in it ter cheer—Hyar's ther drinks; pour 'em down—thank ye fur yer good wishes—ter cheer ther hungry soul, but ter me it is a desert drear. None o' you ever seen me afore, eh?"

They said they never had.

"No, o' course not; yet thar was a time when ev'ry man, woman an' child hyar knowed me. Thar was a time when I was hailed by all with pleasure."

"Then you used ter live hyar?"

"Old settler, pards; one o' ther first. I helped ter put Bullion Bar on its feet an' make it ther hummin' city it now is. An old settler, gents, yet I come back now ter my ancestral halls in sorer. In vain I look fur my old pards. I see them not. Whar be they? I ask, an'—Another round o' drinks hyar—an' ther echoes answer: gone, gone forever!"

Mr. Wells paused and brushed his eyes mournfully, but was cheered a trifle by the arrival of the drinks he had ordered.

"The heart bowed down with sorer is a hard thing ter contemplate," he added.

"People come an' go 'round hyar."

"They mostly go; I really b'lieve they mostly go. I hev come, an' now I hear no friendly voice ter hail me welcome home."

By this time Mr. Wells was nodding, blinking and weeping over the table in an advanced state of intoxication.

"What might yer name be?" asked one of his new friends.

"Slander Elkirk," they understood him to say.

"What?"

"Same as t'other feller shipwrecked on a desert island 'mong strangers—Zlander Selkirk."

"Oh! Alexander Selkirk."

"Just so—just so. Leastways, that's ther name I am now sailin' under; but I don't mind sayin' ter you, knowin' you are my friends, that it is a false name—a *nom du jerry*, which is French fur name o' war. My real name is a prouder, loftier one, which would amaze you ef you heerd. But I can't tell; it's a state secret. I've promised not ter tell, an' I can't. Yet, why not? You're all my friends, an' you're honest men. I will tell. Ay, ay; you shall look upon my card an' see ef you ever heerd o' me afore."

He had fished in his pocket, and, after several desperate attempts, brought out a card similar to that he had given Lucia Brotherton.

He extended it toward one of his companions, with the tell-tale inscription, "Mr. Jack Wells," where it would soon meet other eyes, but as he did so another hand glided over his shoulder and the card was unceremoniously snatched from his grasp.

He sprang to his feet with as much agility as his present condition would allow, full of wrath at such a piece of work and bent on revenge. Such an insult, he inwardly vowed, should not pass unavenged.

He turned to see a large, straight old gentleman, whose face was framed in with white hair and beard, yet who looked at him with keen, flashing eyes. He still held the card, but, as Wells looked, he tore it in two and thrust it into his own pocket.

"By ther sword o' Napoleon!" gasped Jack, "you shall pay fur this with your blood, sirrah—with your blood, d'ye hear? We will fight—"

"My good man, one word with you in private first," calmly observed the old gentleman.

"Say it quick."

"My name is Draper!"

Wells reeled against the wall. It was not the liquor which caused it, for he was already half-sobered, but something a good deal worse. This imposing-looking man was Draper, and he had caught him doing a most foolish thing. All of Wells's fighting temper was gone, and he looked like a whipped bound.

"I want to see you outside," added the old man.

He turned and walked away, and Wells followed as obediently as a child. Not a glance did he give his late cronies, nor did he care if they thought him a coward for giving up his battle. He expected a good sum of money from

Draper, and feared that he had forfeited all claim to it by his folly.

Not until they were well beyond the saloon did Draper give him a chance to say more; then the leader abruptly turned.

"Well, Mr. Wells," he coldly said, "you have opened your campaign at Bullion Bar finely, haven't you?"

"Oh! oh! I'm a fool!" moaned Wells.

"I shall not dispute that."

"'Twas ther cursed liquor."

"Why did you drink it?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I. I've seen something of liquor in my day, and I must say that a man is a fool to touch the stuff!"

"You're right; you're mighty right."

"But this is not to the point. I directed you to come to Bullion Bar, hide your name until you were directed to reveal it, and keep your mouth shut; but here you go to a low saloon and begin to babble like an old woman."

"I was drunk, but I'm sober now. It sha'n't happen ag'in—I swear it!"

"You do seem to have sobered off pretty well, and I think you can understand what I say when I tell you that a repetition of this folly will cost you dearly. You sold Montana Mill to Brotherton, and have squandered all your money. I offer you money enough to put you on your feet if you will help Miss Brotherton to her rights, but bid you keep your mouth shut. Only for my interference you would have spoiled all by revealing your name in the saloon. Now, Wells, if this happens again you will not get one cent from me."

"It won't happen ag'in, captain."

"You promised before."

"I know, but I was homesick, an'—"

"You may be homesick again."

"No, I won't. May ther Old Nick fly away with me ef I touch another drop o' liquor till I am free ter tell jest who I be. I want yer boodle, judge, an' I'll deserve it arter this."

Wells spoke very earnestly. He plainly saw that Draper was not a man with whom he could trifle, and with his head once more clear he deeply regretted his break.

The cold, steady eyes of the white-haired stranger were never turned away, and in plain, emphatic terms he proceeded to lay down the rules which must be followed. He did not tell Wells that he feared the enemy might get possession of him when he was under the influence of liquor and make him talk too much; but he did tell him plainly that he must let liquor alone and keep his wits about him.

Wells promised faithfully, and then he was allowed to go his way. He did not return to the saloon.

Lucia Brotherton might never know it, but Draper had once more done her a great good.

The aged stranger watched Wells out of sight, and then turned and walked rapidly away. His course was toward the river, and when he reached it he crossed the foot-bridge with a firm, confident step.

Reaching the north side, he started away at a rapid pace and the air of one who knows his way well.

He was not destined to go far, however, without an experience calculated to impress the occasion upon his mind. He was passing among the rocks when a suspicious rustling at one side caused him to abruptly leap backward, and as he did so a heavy human figure shot in front of him, and he had a glimpse of a long arm as it went still further than the body.

A sharp click followed—then a disappointed curse.

Draper needed no explanation of this. Some one had attempted to stab him, but, by his timely movement, the blow had spent its force on a rock and broken the knife short off.

The baffled assassin turned quickly, but Draper was ahead of him. One of his clinched hands shot out with the quickness and force of an expert's, and down went the assassin like an ox in the shambles.

Before he could rise Draper had him by the throat.

With an oath the man struggled to rise, but he was held down by a power he could not match.

"You had better give it up," Draper coldly observed. "I should be sorry to choke the life out of such a miserable wretch as you, yet that's what I shall have to do if you don't lie still."

There was a gurgle in the man's throat; then three intelligible words.

"I give up!" he muttered.

"Shows your good sense and—Hallo! is it you, Jake Sharkey?"

A melancholy groan was the only reply.

"I always thought you a murderer, and now I know it," Draper sternly added.

"I didn't mean ter hurt ye," the Black Shark said, with a whimper.

"Of course not. You were going to drive your knife through me through mere playfulness. Fool! why waste words?"

"I thought it was another man."

"Another lie. Come, tell the truth. I have been expecting something of this kind, and it don't surprise me in the least. Now, Sharkey,

there is just one thing for you to do. "I don't want your miserable life, and I won't prosecute, so you can get off scot free simply by telling who hired you to do this work."

"It was all a mistake—"

The hand upon the Shark's throat closed with a grip which made him think that useful part of his anatomy was being torn to pieces. One moment of pain, and then his grasp relaxed.

"That's what you get by lying. Will you tell the truth?"

"Yes," Sharkey groaned.

He had tested that iron hand, and, big bravo that he was, he had no wish to tempt it further. He had none of the heroic in his nature.

"Well, see that you do. I think I can name the party, but it is for you to say. Who hired you?"

One moment of hesitation, and then Sharkey groaned again and answered:

"It was Rufus Brotherton!"

CHAPTER XXV.

LAWYER BARLOW IS PUZZLED.

FOR two days Lawyer Barlow kept a general watch upon Jack Wells, but the latter remained true to his promise to Draper, and, however "homesick" he was, let liquor alone and thereby retained his wits.

On the morning of the third day he entered the lawyer's office with a beaming face, and at once drew a package of papers from his pocket.

"Hyar she be!" he announced, waving it over his head triumphantly.

"Do you mean the deed?"

"Yes, sirree. Jest 'rived by mail."

"Give it here!"

Barlow eagerly took the papers, and, selecting the deed at a glance, spread it out before him. It certified that John Wells had purchased his partner's share of the property known as Montana Mill, and thereby became sole owner thereof.

The lawyer read it through carefully, and then took from his desk a copy of the document by which Cephas Stamford had wrested Montana Mill from the Brothertons.

Laid side by side the two documents were exactly alike, date and all, except while one certified that Wells had bought of Eames, the other as explicitly stated that Eames had purchased of Wells.

A thoughtful frown came to Barlow's forehead. He had never before been so perplexed in his legal career. There were the two papers, and each appeared to be genuine, but it was equally plain that only one could be so. The great question was, which was the real, and which the counterfeit? He could not tell to save his life.

As far as circumstances had admitted, legal formalities had been observed in the sale. Two disinterested parties had been witnesses, but as neither could write, the same hand which had drawn up the paper had written their names, and only a cross showed their work.

Both these men were now dead.

And there lay the two deeds, exactly alike except for the fact that the names of Wells and Eames were reversed, and there was nothing to decide which had been buyer and which seller.

Barlow was not pleased now that he had the paper. Put in court at the same time, one deed would have offset the other, but it was plain that the one which came last would now rank lower than the first. Stamford had possession of Montana Mill; he would meet the second paper by declaring it a forgery, and again the old saw, "Possession is nine points of the law," came in good use.

Wells became impatient at the delay, and finally broke the silence.

"You're all right now, ain't ye?"

"I hope so."

"Don't you know you are?"

"No."

"No? Why not?"

"How do you account for the paper, just like this, held by Eames?"

"Forgery, o' course."

"Didn't you write both?"

"Me? No; Eames wrote 'em."

Barlow turned full upon his witness.

"Eames has always said that you wrote his."

"Then he lied. What! me wield a pen like that? Not much. I kin spread a few ink-tracks, an' that's all."

"Pray sit down here and copy the first paragraph of this document."

Wells promptly sat down, but he was a long time in making the copy. When he was done he leaned back and looked at it triumphantly.

"There—they looks about as much alike ez a spider's web looks like the Missouri River."

He was not very far out of the way. The deed was in a scholarly hand; his copy was certainly a bad piece of work, though fairly legible.

Barlow was more than ever perplexed. At the former trial he had put Eames to this same test, and with about the same result.

"Did you see your former partner write this?"

"Yes—no, I didn't see him, but he said he did."

He got ther thing up, an' ef he didn't do it he got somebody else ter."

"He swears that he saw you write his deed."

"He swears ter a lie then," Wells indignantly

replied. "I never did it. You've got my hand there."

Barlow had it, and he proceeded to compare the two, letter by letter, to see if any character in Wells's copy resembled those in the original. Not a point of resemblance could he find, and he finally leaned back in his chair and looked again at his witness.

"Well?" questioned the latter.

"I am satisfied that you did not write the deed."

"O' course I didn't. I'm no perffessor, ter put up sech elab'rate crooks an' scrawls as them."

"Who do you suppose did?"

"Eames said 'twas him."

"He denied it at the trial, and proved it by giving us a specimen of his work. Now, he must have hired some other citizen of the Bar. Who could it have been? Put on your thinking-cap."

"Wal, thar was Buck Benson, Grizzly George, Pooty Pete, Pincushion Sam, an'—"

"Were they capable of it?"

"Don't think they was."

"Was there not some man—perhaps a young fellow right from the East—who you have not mentioned? Some educated man, you know."

Wells shook his head.

"Don't know of any such," he answered.

And all of Barlow's suggestions failed to quicken his memory. He persisted that Eames had told him that he wrote the deed himself, and Wells for once believed his partner, or said he did.

Failing to get light on this point, Barlow tried to learn where some of the old citizens were. They could not only testify as to the respective characters of Wells and Eames, but could state which of the partners was said at the time to have bought out the other.

Wells cheerfully told all he knew.

Grizzly George had been hung by a Vigilance Committee; Pooty Pete had fallen from a cliff and broken his neck; Buck Benson had died of too much fire-water; and some of the others had met as melancholy fates, while the rest of the old settlers had gone to parts unknown.

"Well," said Barlow, decisively, "we must find some of these men for witnesses. We will advertise and, in the meanwhile, keep quiet. You must remain unknown a while longer, Mr. Wells."

"Ye-es," was the hesitating reply.

Just then a step sounded at the door and Lot Peterson hurriedly entered.

"So you've got ther deed an' Wells," he said, almost breathlessly.

Barlow's face darkened.

"How did you know that?"

"It's all over the place, an' a mighty ripple it hez kicked up, too."

The lawyer turned to Wells.

"You have babbled," he said, sternly.

Wells looked very sheepish, but gradually grew defiant.

"What's ther harm?" he asked. "When I got ther dockymnt I could not help step'in' in, settin' 'em up fur ther boyees, an' jest mentionin' who I was."

Barlow could cheerfully have fallen upon Mr. Jack Wells with "tooth and nail," for his conduct had put an end to all hope of keeping the secret until the missing witnesses could be found. Stamford would soon know of the new discoveries, and he would prepare for the defense.

Wells seemed to have a peculiar faculty of doing things wrong, and the subtle lawyer had no patience with such stupidity.

The damage was done, however, and as it would not be wise to anger the man, Barlow accepted the state of affairs as gracefully as possible. He proceeded to lay down a new set of rules, for it would not do for Wells to get to drinking too heavily, but that person gave the cause a lift, himself, by penitently referring to his weakness and suggesting that Lot Peterson be his constant companion, and "tutor," until the danger was over.

Barlow had had the same scheme in his mind, and he caught at the suggestion eagerly.

Peterson looked a little disgusted, but his devotion to Lucia Brotherton was proof against even more than this, and he agreed at once.

He had not exaggerated when he said the news was all over the place. When Wells made his announcement a small tumult at once ensued. Montana Mill was five-sixths of all Bullion Bar, and its fortunes vitally interested all. The town's prosperity depended on that of the mill.

And when it was known that Wells and a second deed was on the ground, all saw that the legal fight would be reopened and bitter rivalry let loose.

Among those to hear the story was Adam Brotherton, and he at once hurried to his father's office and told the news. Rufus looked as though he were in distress.

"This is bad!" he said.

"Bad! It's most infernal bad. It puts an end to all my hopes of marrying Lucia. We can't make terms with her now."

"Lucia will never marry you willingly."

"Then she shall do so unwillingly!" Adam declared, with an oath.

"Let us look at the matter closely. Wells and the deed are found, and our negotiations with

Lucia end. We have lost all our grip there. Now, I have all along told you that she was lying when she related her experience in the mountain. I'm afraid she saw Hurst there, bought him up and got him to skip. At any rate, Draper warned her against us—"

"And who the fiends is Draper?"

"Just what I want to know. He puzzles me greatly."

"He puzzled Jake Sharkey."

"That Sharkey is a calf. He will never put our man out of the way. You had better try it again, Adam."

The young man shivered.

"I don't aspire," he replied.

"Well, one thing is certain; if we let him go on he will do us great damage. Take courage and go for him. He is only a man, and if you can get a chance to shoot him in the back you will be safe."

Adam gnawed at his mustache and said nothing.

"As for Lucia," pursued Rufus, "there is but one thing to do. We have staked all to win Horace's fortune—and it will be a handsome one when the mill is recovered. We must not lose it now. Well, our only hope is to abduct Lucia and make her marry you."

"Even then she might not do it."

Rufus smiled coldly.

"You are a child. There are ways to break even her proud spirit, and make her glad to become your wife."

The elder man's manner was truly diabolical, but Adam laughed admiringly.

"You've got a long head," he said.

"I never lose a game I set out to play."

"Then go ahead with this. We will abduct Lucia, and I'll let you run the machine."

"Even if she refuses to marry you, we must not lose the Brotherton fortune."

"What chance will be left?"

"I am the next heir after the girl."

"Ah!"

"And," pursued Rufus, his bland voice growing hard, "I am not going to let a silly girl's life stand between me and riches. Lucia becomes your wife or the bride of death!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OLD SAFE.

As had been expected, Cephas Stamford was not long in hearing the news. Bradlock Cowles brought the tidings, and, having told his story, looked curiously at his superior to see how he received the news.

Mr. Stamford heard it without emotion. He listened to the end with undemonstrative interest, and then tersely observed:

"We are ready for them."

"Wells will get himself disliked, won't he, sir?"

"He will get himself into prison. Perjury won't pay."

"He is a bold fellow, anyhow."

"What the world calls bravery is often lack of brains," calmly observed Mr. Stamford. "Is there any answer from Crane and Turner regarding our proposal?"

And with this question he dismissed the subject, and referred to it no more that day.

Since the engagement of Cowles, Redgrave had for the most part attended to outside business. He was away that day, and did not know of the new sensation until he met the family at the table. Even Stamford took his time to speak of it.

"You don't eat heartily, Paul," he said, looking across the table at his partner.

"I am not feeling well," Redgrave confessed.

"The weather, perhaps."

"It may be, but my food does not seem to agree with me the last few days. I don't know why."

Cowles glanced at Alicia. She was looking straight at her plate, but he believed that he could read more in her face than she would care to make known. Then he fixed his attention on Redgrave. The latter was not looking as well as usual; he could see that plainly.

"Mrs. Redgrave is at work on the troublesome rat," thought the bookkeeper.

He forgot the matter temporarily as Stamford quietly announced the latest news. Redgrave ceased eating and looked at his partner gloomily.

"Another legal fight," he said.

"Yes."

"And a harder one than before."

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"We have only to prove this Wells a liar, and I don't think this will be hard. I am anxious for the fight. We shall prove him a perjurer and forever end this case. I have offered to settle with the Brothertons for improvements made by them; now I shall do nothing except what I am forced to. They have forfeited all claim to my charity, and what I have I shall keep."

"Quite properly, too," Redgrave answered.

Bradlock Cowles said nothing. He was not a partner in the Montana Mill, and the factions could fight it out to their hearts' content. He almost forgot to listen as Bess came in, and he watched her glide about with light steps. A

pretty girl, the bookkeeper thought, and the house had been brighter since her coming.

He was very careful to keep his opinion to himself, for there was one there who would not be pleased with it. Those who lived under Stamford's roof trod where footing was precarious in those days, and he would not have cared to get Alicia's hatred.

He had not forgotten the arsenic, and she might remember it if she knew he had any fancy for Bess.

After supper Redgrave felt so poorly that he retired, and Cowles sought a chance to speak with the fair mistress of the house.

"By the way, Mrs. Redgrave," he said, "how are you getting along in your war against the rats?"

She met his gaze boldly. The time was gone when her own regard wavered; she knew that Cowles had not been deceived by her flimsy excuse, and was glad it was so. She believed she knew his mind.

"All seems working well," she answered.

"I think you will triumph in the end."

"And what after that?"

"After that," Cowles answered, meeting her gaze as steadily as it was given, "there will be peace and happiness for you. A troublesome rat is a bad thing to have in the house."

"When I am rid of them, shall you congratulate me?"

"With all my heart."

"With your heart?"

There was a mockery of archness in her question, but the bookkeeper met it in kind.

"I hope I may say so without offense, Mrs. Redgrave."

"You certainly may."

"I think we understand each other."

"Yes, and in the good time coming you shall have a better place at Montana Mill."

She certainly meant that he should understand her, but the sly speech which might have horrified another man only brought a smile to his face. What was it to him if Alicia saw fit to remove the rats she hated, as long as it advanced him to wealth and power? His was not the hand that was administering the arsenic, and he felt quite at ease. By and by, if Alicia was a widow, who could blame him for not looking with interest upon one so fair?

Certainly, Mr. Cowles's conscience did not reproach him, and he did not think it would.

He made an appropriate reply, and then worked on to a subject of interest to him.

"By the way, you were going to investigate in regard to your father's private safe."

"I was, and I have."

"With what result, may I ask?"

"I believe I know the combination—in fact, I know I do, unless he suspected why I visited the study while he had it open, and so changed the word."

"Ah! And do you still think it wise to destroy those old papers, so that no one can happen along and rob you of your inheritance?"

"I certainly do, and I rely on you to help me."

"I will help. When shall we do the work?"

"This very night. Father may change the combination, and undo all I have learned. If you will, pretend to retire early, and then come to the study at just eleven o'clock. I will be there, and the secret of the safe shall soon be ours."

"You can depend on me."

The interview was not prolonged beyond a few more minutes. There was more than one reason why the plotting pair did not want to be seen together, and Cowles went his way. As he did so he encountered Bess and stopped.

He was acting a very benevolent part toward Sharkey's girl. She needed encouragement in her effort to rise out of the depths, and he was doing all he could to help her. If the others were kind, they did not understand her feelings and nature as he did. In her opinion, he towered far above them, and she looked to him for advice and encouragement.

She had grown wonderfully patient, but Bradlock Cowles would do well to remember the fire that lay dormant in her nature.

If he ever undertook to marry Alice, this fire might come to the surface and be a raging volcano.

Once in his room, the bookkeeper smoked several cigars in rapid succession. Cool as he was, he felt that events were pressing hard. He was playing a bold game, and there was deadly danger in Stamford's house. He needed to play well to save his neck.

He did not forget Alicia's request, and, at eleven, he went to the study. He carried a revolver, feeling that it might become useful and necessary.

Alicia was already there, and she greeted him with a welcoming smile and a gesture to request silence.

"Have you waited long?" he asked.

"I have only just come."

"I suppose the coast is clear?"

"All clear. I think we need not fear interruption if we are prudent."

"Then to work. What is the magic letter of the combination?"

"Selah."

"Selah, eh? Rather a biblical word to handle, but I reckon it is all the same. Now for the trial."

He knelt down and, with Alicia holding the lamp, began his work. He turned the letters on the safe until the desired word was properly spelled, and then essayed to open it. The door remained firm. He pulled and twisted several times, and then looked up at Alicia.

"Some hitch here."

"Can it be that the word has been changed?"

"I'm afraid it has."

"I don't believe it."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, but I feel that it has not," was Alicia's logical reply.

"Possibly you are right, for I am not yet sure I understand this contrivance. It is not like any other safe I ever saw, and it may be there is more to overcome than a mere word combination. Here is a series of revolving points, and though I can't understand what part they have to play, it is clear that they have some use. The question is, what is it?"

His hands moved over the mysterious machinery, turning each part in a hap-hazard way, but no change worked any good. The safe-door remained as firm as though it was bolted in place.

Cowles suddenly looked up.

"I don't suppose there is any burglar alarm attached to this concern," he anxiously said.

"Not to my knowledge."

"If so, we may yet find ourselves in a bad box."

"I don't think there is any danger."

"Here goes for another attempt, then."

Again he twisted and turned, but there was no perceptible change until one of the points, which had before seemed only a blank space, suddenly revolved and showed the letter "e" in the center.

"Hallo! what's all this?"

"I don't know, but you are making a gain, anyway. Keep on!" Alicia nervously advised.

Cowles obeyed. A few more turns he made, and then another point revolved and the letter "a" came into view. Something was being effected, whatever it was, and he kept at it briskly. Then another point showed a letter—this time it was "l."

"By George!" the bookkeeper exclaimed, "this is encouraging. Here we have three letters of the word 'Selah.' Now, I'll wager something we have only to produce the other two and the battle will be won and the safe open!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ROBBING OF THE ROBBERS.

ALICIA was flushed with excitement, and the strong hands which worked at the safe were far from steady. If the woman had but known it, Bradlock Cowles had more interest in the opening of the safe than she had; so much interest that even his usually steady nerves felt the strain.

Quickly his hands moved over the remaining points, and then an "s" came to view, followed by the only remaining letter—"h."

"Selah" was spelled in the second place as it already was on the combination proper.

Once more he pulled on the safe-door. This time no strength was needed—it swung back easily and without noise. The battle was won, and he had a view of the interior of the safe, filled as it was with a multitude of papers.

"Eureka!" Alicia exclaimed.

"The first step is taken, Mrs. Redgrave."

"But what a pile of papers!"

She was about to dive into them with both hands, but Cowles stopped her.

"Wait! The whole interior shows that your father is a wonderfully systematic man. It is highly probable that if these papers were stirred up he would detect the fact, and know that interlopers had been here. We must proceed carefully and protect ourselves. One paper at a time must be the rule, and all to be restored to their old places. We must not betray ourselves."

"You have a long head," Alicia said, admiringly.

"A man needs a long head, and a deep one, in this world of ours."

So saying, Cowles began on the papers, and was pleased to find that their work would be greatly expedited by the care used by Stamford. All the papers were collected in packages, tied together and clearly marked, so that the subject of each was to be seen at a glance.

Cowles took advantage of this and handled them rapidly. Each one was examined and restored to its former position, and the work went on with close attention from both the searchers. They hovered over the safe, and forgot all else as they worked.

The bookkeeper was not discouraged by the fact that they did not come upon what they sought at once; he had expected it to be well back in the safe, and his attention was directed that way.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation and held up a thick package.

"Now, indeed, you can say 'Eureka!' he exclaimed.

"Eureka! Eureka!" echoed Alicia.

For Bradlock Cowles held in his grasp that upon which was written in bold letters:

"THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF RALPH STAMFORD,
"To be opened only by my daughter Alicia."

The coveted papers were found at last, and Mrs. Redgrave stretched out her hand eagerly. "Give them to me!" she exclaimed.

Cowles was about to obey, but at that moment something strange and startling occurred. Another hand glided over his shoulder and the package was snatched from his grasp, while at the same time the lamp went over with a crash and the room was plunged in darkness.

Cowles tried to spring to his feet, but as he did so a strong hand caught him and he was hurled to the floor several feet away.

He went over in a heap, but his wits did not desert him, and he drew his revolver and crouched in silence, waiting to use it.

He could hear quick, heavy breathing, and then Alicia's voice arose almost hysterically:

"Oh! Bradlock! Bradlock! What is it?"

Cowles sprung to the door.

"Get another light!" he directed, knowing that a lamp stood on Stamford's table.

The woman had presence of mind enough to obey, and while she was occupied her ally listened intently. He had common sense enough to suppose that the unknown was gone, but if he was still in the room he wished to secure him.

Once more the light shone, and he looked eagerly about. He and Alicia were the only occupants of the room, and, worse than all else, the precious papers had disappeared with the unknown.

Muttering a few indistinct words, Cowles caught the lamp from the woman's hand and hurried from the room. It might not yet be too late to intercept the robber. His own course was toward the back door, but as he reached it, he had an answer to any question in his mind.

The door was open.

He came to a halt, but Alicia's voice sounded beside him.

"Why do you stop?" she asked.

"We might as well—this door tells the whole story. The robber has made good his escape, and we might as well hunt for a lightning-bolt. The jig is up, and the papers are gone!"

There was no sign of the careless smile on his face then, and it showed a more bitter disappointment than did Alicia's. She might have wondered at it had she been less excited.

"Can't we do something?" she asked.

"What can we do? The man is gone, and the whole world is before him."

"But he has the papers."

"Yes."

Cowles closed and fastened the door, and then turned to his ally with a scowling face.

"This has proved a sorry piece of work."

"And the papers are gone forever."

"I don't think so. No robber would let such a prize lay idle. When he knows the value of what he has taken he will probably apply to some one for money to redeem them. That is what I dread. If he should come to you, all well and good—I would deal with him. But what I fear is that he will go to your father."

"And then father will know all."

"Yes."

"Did you see the man?"

"Nothing but his hand. I suppose it was the same with you?"

"Yes. I did not catch even a glimpse of him."

Cowles led the way back to the study. He had been afraid that the noise would arouse either Stamford or Redgrave, but as all continued quiet there he gave up that idea. But the precious papers for which he had schemed were gone, and he was too angry and disappointed to express one-half of it in words.

The philosophical part of his nature gradually came to the front, and he reclosed the safe. It was not hard to restore the double combination to its former condition, and when it was done there was no outward sign of the night's work.

Alicia was far from reconciled to the situation, and she had cause to feel as she did. Her interference with the long and careful work of her father had served to put the tell-tale papers into the hands of an unknown party, and, at the least, she feared that her work would be made known to Stamford.

On the other hand, it might be she had lost the Stamford fortune through her folly. How compromising the lost papers were she did not know, but they might serve to put the son of Ralph Stamford in her place, heir to all their grandfather had left.

Even her liking for Cowles might not have served to shield him from her anger, for she felt that he ought to have saved the papers, had it not been for the expression on his face. She read there that he was bitterly disappointed by their loss.

How disappointed he was she did not know, nor how, after they separated, he sat for hours in his own room, regretting it and trying to discover light in the future.

For over a year he had been trying to secure those papers, yet he had never known of their existence until that night. He had suspected

that Stamford held something of the kind, and on this chance he had worked.

Surely, it could have been no common motive which urged him on.

Now that the papers were in hostile hands—what? The thief would probably find them important, and seek to make money out of them. Would he seek Stamford, or the heir of Ralph?

"I am not sure," muttered the bookkeeper, "but that Ralph Stamford's son ought to advertise now. I could put in a notice and sign his name—I don't think he would object to that. I don't believe the thief can find him. No, the thief will apply to Cephas Stamford, and then the great hope of my life will be dashed to ruin. The outlook is not good, but I must endure until I can cure."

He arose, undressed and went to bed.

In the morning he was his old, careless self at the table, but Alicia did not appear. She sent word that she was sick, and he believed it. No doubt her nerves were seriously upset.

Redgrave, too, was not well. He ate but little, and had a pallor unusual to him.

Cowles believed he could as readily account for this; it was not the robbery of the safe, but the war on the troublesome rat.

Ill or not Redgrave was not the man to neglect business, and he was not much behind Cowles in starting for the office. He had gone but half the way when he was approached by a man who had evidently been waiting for him.

This was Jake Sharkey.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Redgrave."

"Good-morning."

Paul was passing on with this terse greeting, but the boatman stopped him.

"Ain't you forgot somethin'?"

"What do you mean?"

"It's about ther time o' ther month when you give me ther collat'ral you favor me with."

Redgrave looked at the Black Shark with a scowl.

"You never forget it."

"Why should I? Ther money is a God-send ter me, now I am old, broke down an' weak—"

"That will do. You shall have the money, though I am a fool to give it to you."

"Oh! no, you ain't. I'm same ez any man you hire, an' I earn my boodle. Some men labor fur you in ther mill; I keep mum ez ter what I see'd ther night Horace Brotherton accidentally fell off ther foot-bridge."

"And act the blackmailer."

"Be you willin' I should tell what I see an' heard that night, Cap?"

The Black Shark's manner was very significant, and Redgrave wasted no more words. Taking a roll of money from his pocket he handed over the usual monthly sum, which Sharkey received with cringing gratitude.

"You're a trump, boss, an' I won't forget it. Ef ever I hev a chance ter help ye, I'll do it."

"Help me how?—out of the world?"

"No, no; I ain't that sort o' a man. Report wrongs me, Cap, an' I assure you—"

"Assure me nothing," Redgrave curtly replied. "I know you to be the biggest rascal un-hung!"

So saying he passed on, leaving Sharkey scowling malignantly after him.

"Aha! he puts on frills, does he? Thinks himself too good ter talk with me, eh? Now, look a-hyar, Mister Redgrave, Esquire, you'd better not fly too high. I hev only ter tell what I see'd ther night Brotherton died an' you will git yer durned neck stretched, you will. You pushed him off ther foot-bridge, an' ef you try ter shake me, you'll hang fur it—that's what you will do!"

And he shook his fist after the ex-secretary.

The latter did not look back, but his mind, too, was busy.

"I am tired of giving money to this scoundrel," he thought, "and I am about done. Come what will, I'll give him no more. My life is not so pleasant that I need worry if he does tell all; I'm as well off out of the world as in it. Besides, I'm not sure any one would believe him if he did tell. Be that as it may, I give him no more money. He may tell, and I will bear the consequences!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ADAM SHOWS HIS HAND.

MIDNIGHT.

Three men entered Bullion Bar from the western, or mountain side, each man on foot, but leading a horse. As the animals seemed to be in good condition this was a singular fact, and it increased to suspicion when it was noticed that all the men wore masks.

As road-agents did not flourish in that vicinity it became a problem of some interest to know what these men intended to do. They appeared like anything but honest men, and their movements were furtive and cautious.

Before the more thickly settled part of the town was reached they held a consultation, and one of their number took charge of all the horses. Then the other two went on alone and left him behind.

A few minutes' walk took them to a private house, before which they paused for a moment. It was that owned by Lucia Brotherton.

No light was visible, but, after a short scrutiny, they advanced to the door and knocked

softly. It was a peculiar knock, and very efficacious. The door was at once opened a trifle, and a voice sounded from the dark interior:

"Who is there?"

"Men from Adam."

"Come in at once, then."

They entered, and an unseen hand guided them into another room. Then a light was produced, and the masked men and Rufus Brotherton stood facing each other.

"Well, is all going well?" the old man asked, peering sharply at them.

"Right on wheels."

"Where is your employer?"

"Waitin' a leetle back with ther hosses."

"Good! All is ready for you here, and I would suggest that you get away at once. The girl is chloroformed, but I have kept her solong under the influence of it that I am very reluctant to give her more. She won't need it when once away from the Bar, and it might injure her."

"Then don't stand talkin' hyar. We're a l ready ter go, an' anxious. March out yer gabelle!"

The men were too blunt to please Rufus, but he could not afford to parley there. He led the way to the next room. There, indeed, was some one sleeping a drugged sleep, and it was Lucia. Her scheming relatives had not abandoned their plan of kidnapping her, and Rufus had done his part by reducing her to insensibility.

He gave a few directions, and the masked men lifted the girl as though she had been a child. Calmly, and in a business-like way, they bore her from the house, and Rufus threw on his hat and followed.

His allotted part in the work was done, but he did not know these men well enough, nor trust them enough, to let them go alone. They might see fit to play false to their employer.

So through the village they went until they reached the place where the third masked man waited with the horses. This man, of course, was Adam.

He exchanged a few words with his father, and then took the prisoner upon his horse in front of him. Lucia was still unconscious and there was no resistance. No time was wasted by Adam; he turned his horse's head toward the mountains, and rode away with his tools at his heels.

Rufus was left behind.

The kidnappers were soon gone from the village, and they pushed ahead at a trot along the trail which led to Cottonwood Camp.

The ride was begun in silence, as far as human speech was concerned, and as the snow was wholly gone in most places along the trail this taciturnity made the ringing of the horses' feet on the rocks all the more noticeable. Yet Adam heard it not. It mattered not to him how many echoes the hills had; he had more important matters on his mind. A decisive step had at last been taken, and he would make or break on the result of that night's work.

In his way he cared for Lucia, but it was the way of a ruffian, and he cared more for her money.

He urged his horse to a lively pace, and two miles were soon covered. Before that time he had seen signs that Lucia was recovering, and he knew that the crisis would soon come. A little further he went, and then drew up at a point where a canyon crossed the trail, but at such a level that they were near its bottom.

This had been one of the points where a temporary river went sweeping along when the spring flood came, but the water had so abated that the stream was now small, and on either side of it was a dry region, stretching along at the base of the cliffs.

Adam waited with Lucia's head on his arm, marking every sign of her recovery, until at last a more decisive movement showed that she was fully conscious.

"Be calm," said he. "You are in no danger, my dear Lucia. Be calm."

She recognized the voice, but knew at once that her situation was not what it should be. Questions trembled on her lips, and her manner was frightened.

"I may as well tell you all at once, Lucia," Adam continued. "You know as well as I do that I love you, but how strong that passion is you cannot guess. For years it has been the great hope of my life to call you mine. You know how my efforts have resulted; you refused to listen to my pleadings. But, Lucia, I cannot live without you, and I have taken this way to make you mine."

She had tried to interrupt, but his words flowed on like a river. Now, however, she exclaimed:

"You have taken the poorest of all ways. I see that you have drugged and stolen me, but it will do you no good."

"Surely you will not refuse me again?"

"I surely shall."

"Remember you are no longer in your own home at Bullion Bar."

"What do you mean?"

"That here my power is greater than yours."

"You are not powerful enough to make me promise to marry you!" Lucia retorted, with spirit.

"I may as well speak plainly first as last. I cannot win you by every-day methods, and I have taken the only course open to me. I now give you a choice of two things. Ahead of us is Cottonwood Camp, and at that place there is a minister who will marry us and ask no questions—"

"I have heard of him; a man forced to flee from the East because of misdemeanors."

"He is a minister, all the same, and preacher at Cottonwood, and if he marries us it is as good as though a bishop did the job."

"He will not marry us. I flatly refuse!" Lucia declared, bravely.

"Wait—you have not heard the alternative."

"The alternative?"

"Yes."

Something in his manner had made her shiver, and she found no further words.

"Back in the mountain," Adam inexorably continued, "there is a cave, the existence of which is known to no one but myself and the two men you see with me. It is their home. They live there because they are wanted for killing several people at Cottonwood. Their name is Absley—perhaps you have heard of them?"

Lucia shivered. The question had been unnecessary, for they and their deeds were known to all within two hundred miles.

"If you refuse to go to Cottonwood and marry me," Adam went on, "you go to the mountains with these men to remain until you will become my wife. Perhaps you will now change your mind—or do you like the idea of living in their cave?"

The mask had wholly fallen from Brotherton's face at last, and Lucia knew that all Draper had said was true. Her cousin was a villain of the worst kind, and, more than that, he was the most dangerous enemy she had.

She did not at once reply, and he more gently added:

"If I am harsh, you have forced me to it. What is your answer?"

"No—forever, no!" Lucia exclaimed.

"Think again."

"I have thought enough."

"And are you willing to go to the cave?"

"I had rather die than become your wife."

"You will not be allowed to die," Adam answered, with an evil smile. "Now, Lucia, don't be so madly foolish. Nobody wishes you better than I, but I have my own interests to consider. Marry me, and I swear that I will consider your happiness in all ways. Come, shall we go to Cottonwood?"

"No!"

"Then our course is there!"

He stretched out one hand toward the mountains, and his voice was hard and inexorable.

Lucia was trembling with excitement and fear, but she did not waver. Not in the least would she give way to this ruffian. If she had possessed a weapon she would have made a fight to free herself from peril, but she was utterly helpless.

"Well, to the mountains, then," harshly added her captor, dropping his arm. "You will have a bonny prisoner, men."

The subordinates laughed in concert, turned their horses and rode into the canyon. Adam and his captive followed after, and the darker shadows of the cliffs seemed to fall upon Lucia like an icy hand.

Suddenly, however, the scene changed. A man rushed from the base of the cliff and seized Adam's horse by the head, while at the same moment Lucia was plucked from the saddle as though by giant hands. She was too much surprised to wonder what it meant, but in a moment she was set upon her feet and a voice sounded in her ears:

"Remain here, whatever may happen. We are friends who will aid you, but don't wander away and get lost. Your life may depend upon your obedience."

And then the speaker hastened away to join the other men.

He was needed there.

Adam had cried out when robbed of his prey, and his allies had turned to see what was wrong. They saw Adam unhorsed and struggling in the grasp of an unknown man, and, with their fighting blood suddenly aroused, they hastened to his aid.

Another moment and all were joined in a general fight.

And such was the scene which Lucia looked upon as she cowered back against the cliff, with the shouts of the men and the sound of heavy blows ringing in her ears.

To her it was a terrible experience.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS PROTECTOR.

THE scene was more like a nightmare to Lucia than one from real life. Perhaps her mind was not wholly free from the influence of the chloroform, and as she crouched by the cliff and watched the fight it seemed like a strife among beings more than human, recalling, somehow, Dore's pictures of scenes from Milton.

But to those engaged it was very real, and they fought as only strong-armed men can. To and fro they whirled, striking out and grap-

pling, then reeling blindly, falling, and rolling in that same grapple.

To her dying day Lucia would not forget that night, but the battle was over at last. One of the men advanced and took her hand.

"Come," he said, "you are now safe, and you had better leave here. Come with me—my men will join us soon."

It was he who had taken her from Adam's arms, and she followed unhesitatingly. He led her back to the trail, and gently added:

"Have no further fear; you are safe."

She looked at him closely.

"I know you!" she abruptly said.

"Who am I?"

"Draper. I don't know that that explains much, for even at that you are a puzzle to me; but, one thing is sure—you have saved me again, and I thank you a thousand times. In this case words are weak, but you may surmise that I mean it all when I say that my eternal gratitude is yours."

"I ask no more."

Draper spoke in a quiet, subdued voice, and turned his gray head away as though he cared to say no more.

"I can't imagine how you arrived here so timely," the girl continued, after a pause.

"Did I not tell you I would watch over you?"

"Yes, but I expected less than this."

"Only for a slight error of one of my men you would have been rescued before Bullion Bar was left behind. As it is, you have been shown plainly what Adam Brotherton is. There, do not shiver; the danger is past, and I think you will see him no more. After to-night he certainly will not dare show his face at the Bar."

They were interrupted by the arrival of the two men who had helped Draper.

"Is all done?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then secure the horses and we will return."

This order was obeyed, and the whole party was soon on the trail to the Bar. What had been done with Adam and his tools Lucia did not know—Draper made an evasive answer to the question. He rode by her side, and, with all her curiosity and interest aroused, she tried to get more information in regard to him. At times there was the old, familiar sound to his voice, but not enough to place him.

In reply to her questions he repeated that he had known her father, and that was all the information she could get.

His disposition to help her did not end with her rescue, but he mapped out a course for her to pursue which met with her approval. She must have some new home, and no place was better than her lawyer's house. He was an honest man, and would agree to any precautions for her safety.

As for the Brothertons, as she did not wish to prosecute them, it would be well to notify Rufus that Bullion Bar could get along without him. And Draper agreed to protect her from Adam.

"I do not want you to worry over this night's work," Draper said, as they neared the Bar, "for you have lost no friends—you have merely learned who are your enemies, and you have friends enough left. I trust that a brighter day is ahead of you. Montana Mill will soon be yours again, and the plots of Stamford and Redgrave revealed, and I hope to see the mystery of your father's fate made plain."

Lucia started and looked at her companion.

"Have you any light on that subject?"

"Nothing that I care to tell as yet, but I may safely tell you to hope for the best."

"One question, at least—did he die a natural death?"

"I believe not."

Lucia shivered.

"Who—was the guilty man?"

"You once had a suspicion."

"I thought it might be Paul Redgrave, but it seems too terrible."

"Why so? You know him to be a renegade; may he not be murderer, also?"

"I should be sorry to know it. I set on foot the charges against him, but I was wholly unnerfed and excited. I was carried away by my feelings, and never had any proof against him. Have you that proof?"

"No. I do not want to wrong Redgrave, who is making recompense for his sins through mental and physical suffering—he is ill and unhappy—and I will make no charge against any one until I can prove what I believe. Like you I have at times acted hastily, and now I want to make amends by proceeding with caution."

By this time Bullion Bar was reached, and the party went direct to Barlow's. He was astonished by their arrival, but readily agreed to shelter Lucia.

Draper refused all offers of shelter, and rode away with his men.

The next day two items of news reached Lucia. The first was that Rufus Brotherton had left the place, and there was evidence to show that he had been warned to leave by Draper. The penalty of return was said to be death, and as a sample of retribution he had been ducked in the pond until he could hardly stand.

Lot Peterson made an effort to trace this rumor and failed.

The second report came just at dark. There had been a tragedy at Cottonwood. The Absley outlaws had been delivered to justice by two unknown men, and the citizens of the camp had closed their earthly career in the prompt and permanent way of Judge Lynch.

Lucia knew then what had become of Adam's tools, and who had delivered them to justice.

Truly, Draper's hand was both mysterious and heavy.

There was another sensation in store for Lucia and her lawyer that night. A rap sounded at the door, and when the servant opened it a letter was thrust into her hands by a man who immediately beat a retreat without a word of explanation. It was found that the letter was addressed to Lucia, and when it was opened these lines were found, written in a curious, cramped, old-fashioned hand:

"MISS BROTHERTON:—Your enemies are not yet content, though the new danger comes from another source. To-night an attempt will be made to open lawyer Barlow's safe, and steal the papers upon which you rely in your battle to regain Montana Mill. A word to the wise is sufficient, and Barlow must not let any doubt deter him from action."

"EZEKIEL DRAPER."

It was another bombshell in camp, but Barlow smiled quietly.

"If any one tries it he will find himself in a fix, that's all. Lot Peterson and I will hide in the dark in the office, and whoever appears will get into trouble. We'll capture him, or them, and, my word for it, 'twill not hurt our case in court if it is known that the Stamfords tried to steal our papers."

"We again have Draper to thank," murmured Lucia, absently.

"Yes, and we now have a specimen of his writing. You say you suspect that you have seen him before. Do you see anything familiar about the penmanship?"

"No; it is like that of most old people—a little different from the present style. My father made many letters like these."

"I hope your unknown friend will soon see fit to explain himself. I can't see why he works in the dark. From the girl's description I believe it was he who brought the letter. Well, why didn't he stop and tell us, instead—but it may be he was in haste. At any rate, I must prepare for the safe-robber, instead of idly lingering here."

So saying, Barlow arose, went out, found Lot Peterson and went to the office. Once there they concealed themselves in a smaller room off the office, and waited in the dark as patiently as possible.

Midnight came and passed before anything suspicious was seen or heard, but their waiting was not to be in vain. A sound at the window was the first evidence, and it soon resolved itself into the efforts of a man trying to enter. They let him work, and he was so successful that the window was soon open.

Then he entered.

Next a faint light was shown, and they saw a burly man surveying the room by means of a dark lantern. He uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he saw the safe and dropped on his knees beside it.

Barlow smiled grimly. He knew that even a skillful cracksman would find it hard to open, and he was satisfied to give this man time enough to test the contrivance. He might find that he had underrated the safe.

The man went down on his knees and began work with some implement not discernible to the watchers, but Barlow, though inexperienced in safe-burglary, soon decided that this particular burglar was a novice. His instrument did not seem to work favorably, and he began to growl in an angry way which brought a smile to the lawyer's face.

It was at this time that something occurred which surprised the watchers as much as it did the burglar. None of the trio had heard a suspicious sound, yet, all at once, there stood a man beside the light-fingered party.

While Barlow and Peterson looked in surprise the new-comer laid a hand on the burglar's arm, and that person started up with a frightened cry.

He found a revolver presented at his breast.

"Hold on right there, Mr. Jake Sharkey!" said a hoarse voice. "You see this 'six' is smiling at you—well, it'll spit fire and lead if you don't go slow. Stand still!"

The burglar growled an oath.

"Who be you?" he added.

"I'm a man of mystery and brimstone; a devastating, epidemical sirocco on skates, as it were; and if you get my mad up I shall annihilate you. Chew that, and don't tread on my toes."

The man with the revolver rattled off this warning in a jolly, but hoarse voice, but his revolver did not waver a fraction. Barlow was trying to recognize him, but it was a failure. Who he was, and why he was there, was a mystery.

CHAPTER XXX.

A DANGEROUS SECRET.

JAKE SHARKEY was the robber. There was no doubt about that, and he was as badly fright-

ened as he usually was when danger showed itself. He stared at the man who had thus come upon him, but the darkness and a mask prevented any recognition.

"Who are you?" he whined, disconsolately. "I ain't doin' any harm. I only come in ter see ther lawyer, an'—"

"Oh! rubbish. Do you take me for a fool? You are here as a burglar, but I have nipped your game in the bud. You can get out of here on the run. My will is good enough to have you arrested, but I don't care to show my hand in the game. You can go free simply by going."

"Ain't you a friend o' Barlow?"

"Not a bit."

"S'pose we divvy, then."

"Divvy, you scoundrel! Not much! I'll climb all over you if you say that again; I'm not your kind. Come, are you going to go?"

"Lawyer Barlow touched his companion."

"Now!" said he. "Seize the burglar, anyhow."

And out they rushed together.

Sharkey uttered a frightened cry and flung his dark-lantern away. Then he made a bolt for the window, but was not quick enough. Peterson pounced upon and tripped him, and Barlow gave his aid. The Black Shark fought fiercely, but he fought in vain. Lot was nearly his master, and with the lawyer to help he was without a hope.

In a short time he was reduced to helplessness, and was begging for mercy. Barlow then struck a light. His first act was to glance about for the man with the revolver, but he had made good his escape.

The lawyer turned to Sharkey. He knew the boatman well by sight, and was not surprised to find him engaged in such work. The prisoner was very meek and humble now that danger had come, and he submitted with cringing docility.

Barlow placed him in a chair and sat down opposite him.

"Fine business you're in, my man."

"I was a fool!" groaned the boatman.

"You are right on that point. What else have you to say for yourself?"

"I'm sorry and would like ter go."

"What childlike innocence! Well, you can't go. Now, I want you to tell who sent you here."

Sharkey hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

"Nobody."

"Don't lie!"

"I'm poor an' hungry, an' I needed bread an'—"

"Nonsense! I know some one sent you, and you may as well own up. Who was it?"

The Black Shark twisted in his chair, and he tried to twist his speech, but Barlow was not the man to be beaten. He held the fellow to the rack, and Sharkey's courage finally gave way entirely.

"I'll tell," he mournfully said.

"Who was it?"

"Alicia Stamford—I mean, Redgrave's wife."

"My man, are you lying?"

"It's ther truth—I swear it."

"Well, on the whole there is nothing strange about it, though it was a weak and cowardly device to send a woman as an agent. It shows how contemptible a fellow Stamford is."

"Ther gal said her father didn't know of it."

"Redgrave, then."

"Him, too. I was ter keep ther secret from both on 'em."

"A mere trick; of course both knew of it. They used her as their agent, and a mean thing to do it was. She is a spitfire, and unscrupulous enough. I have no doubt, but— Well, never mind. You shall be a witness at the trial, my man, and for safety we will keep you in jail until then."

Sharkey pleaded in vain. Barlow knew he had a good point against the Stamford faction, and was not going to let it slip. He could tell a jury that the weakness of the Stamford case was shown by the fact that they had tried to steal the "genuine deed," and the argument could not but carry weight.

The Black Shark was asked who the man with the revolver had been, but he was wholly ignorant on that point. It puzzled Barlow a good deal. He felt sure it had not been Draper—indeed, he had seen that the man's hair was black—but who had made a descent upon Sharkey, and then run so precipitately when others appeared?

It was one more addition to the many mysteries which surrounded the case, but Barlow felt sure that it was capable of a logical solution if the man's identity could be settled.

The Bullion Bar jail had not been occupied for some time, but Jake Sharkey passed the rest of the night there, surrounded by a guard composed of a jailer, a dog and a revolver. Barlow had declared that Sharkey must not escape, and the jailer did not intend he should.

The night's work was done, and Lucia Brotherton owed another debt of gratitude to Draper, but the mystery of his identity was no nearer discovery, it seemed.

Bullion Bar had a new sensation the next day.

Jake Sharkey was in jail, and he had confessed that he had been sent by "the Stamfords"—that was the general term—to steal the document upon which Lucia Brotherton relied to recover Montana Mill.

For once the boatman was believed, and a flood of indignation rolled out against Stamford and his family. Outside that house he had scarcely a friend after that, and one indignant citizen, who advocated burning the mill to spite its holders, gained many converts until some one appeased their wrath by saying that Stamford was sure to lose it at law, anyway.

Redgrave came in for the heaviest opprobrium. He had acted the part of a traitor and sneak, merely to work his own good, it was charged, and there was talk of tar and feathers in his case.

He was even hooted by the small boys when he went home to dinner, but never looked around. Perhaps he scarcely realized what it meant. He was looking miserably, and when he said that he did not feel well no one doubted his word.

Bradlock Cowles might have explained this if he had seen fit, but he held his peace and basked in Mrs. Redgrave's dangerous smiles.

The weight of their guilty secret had grown more pronounced since the night that they stole the package of papers from Stamford's safe, and so soon lost them again.

Every hour they expected that the robber of the robbers would apply to Stamford and thereby betray them, and they watched him closely, trying to read his expression. If he knew of their guilt he made no sign, however.

Cowles had put a cautiously expressed advertisement in a neighboring paper which he hoped would reach the robber's eyes. If he saw it he would naturally suppose that it came from Ralph Stamford's son, but thus far it had not been answered.

Nothing seemed capable of destroying Bradlock's good-humor, but those were anxious days for him.

The night of this day brought forth a new complication. The quartette sat up later than usual to discuss the arrest of Sharkey and the story he had told. Barlow had not particularized Alicia in casually mentioning the attempted burglary, and Stamford supposed the accusation aimed at him.

He, Alicia and Redgrave all stoutly denied any knowledge of the affair, and Sharkey was branded a liar. His testimony, Stamford hoped, could be broken down when the trial took place, but it was an annoying and dangerous complication.

Alicia was the first to retire, and Cowles soon started for his own room.

He had barely left the other men when Alicia glided up to him, her face pale and her eyes startled.

"The devil is to pay!" she exclaimed, with more force than elegance.

"What is wrong?" he demanded, in alarm.

"That girl—Bess—has caught me dropping something—you can guess what—in the water Paul has placed on his table every night."

"Ah! And what then?"

"She says she will tell him?"

"She does, eh?"

"She will have it that I mean harm, and all my protestations to the contrary are of no avail. She says she is going to tell you first, and she's waiting above to see you. She says I am—trying to poison Paul!"

Alicia dropped her voice to a sibilant whisper, and Cowles shivered. He had never before realized so fully what a plot the woman was manipulating. Her face was that of a fiend, and, somehow, he felt cold.

She clasped his hand in one of hers and looked straight into his eyes.

"Bradlock," she said, and her voice was like a caress, "the time has come for you to prove your attachment to me. If Bess tells Paul Redgrave, our hopes are ruined and my life will be in danger. She must not tell. What! is her miserable life to stand between us and happiness? No—a thousand times, no! She must be removed, and at once!"

Cowles's gaze fell and he shivered slightly. Even to him this must have seemed like a little too much of cold-blooded villainy, but he was himself again in a moment.

He looked up with the old, light smile on his face.

"Leave this part to me," he said. "We can't remove her without danger, but I feel sure I can silence her. She feels grateful to me for getting her a place, and I am confident that I can convince her that she has a false impression. Let me see her alone."

"Do so, but, remember, unless she changes her mind I shall see that she never tells what she has seen."

Alicia's voice was pitiless, but Cowles seemed very much at his ease.

"Trust me," he said, cheerfully, "and all will be well."

He went to Bess. Alicia was too busy with her thoughts, and too excited, to make any effort to overhear what was said, and she walked another room nervously while awaiting his return. Her secret was in danger, and though her con-

science did not trouble her, the fear of detection did.

But Cowles returned in fifteen minutes, smiling as cheerfully as ever.

"All's well!" he said, lightly. "I argued with the girl and showed her how ridiculous her suspicion was, and she has given up her wild idea. She asks you to pardon her, and—there is no further danger, Mrs. Redgrave."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CURSE OF CRIME.

THE two men sat in a wretched shanty which stood in the outskirts of the town of Wild Horse. It was a mining-camp, and much smaller than the adjacent towns of Bullion Bar and Cottonwood Camp. Moreover, it was further back in the heart of the mountains, and few people ever went there except on business.

Wild Horse was not a thriving town, and it was looked down upon by all its neighbors.

These men in the shanty were Rufus Brotherton and his son. They had changed for the worse since we saw them last, and Adam, in particular, had a worn and haggard look. Fear, remorse or disease seemed at work upon him, and he was growing old.

He slept, and Rufus watched him, but it was not a peaceful sleep. He muttered and groaned, and his limbs twitched nervously, causing Rufus to shake his head mournfully.

He believed his son to be the most wronged of mortals.

Suddenly Adam uttered a yell and sprung to his feet. He glared about wildly, and then, seeing nobody but his father, dropped into a chair with a curse on his lips. He brushed his hand across his forehead, and profuse perspiration clung to it.

"A bad dream, Adam?" the elder man blandly asked.

"I dreamed I was being hung," answered the son, with a shiver. "I was marched to the scaffold—the rope was placed around my neck—Ugh! I wonder if all villains suffer as I do?"

"My dear boy," Rufus expostulated, "you should not apply such a term to yourself. You are unfortunate—"

"Devilish unfortunate!" Adam growled. "I have had no peace of mind since I heard what they did with the Absleys, at Cottonwood. I see danger everywhere."

"You are ill and nervous, my son."

"The curse of crime is on me!" muttered the younger man, gnawing morosely at his mustache.

"Nonsense!"

"I expect to go as the Absleys did."

"Worse and worse! Why indulge in such thoughts?"

"Why does the man in the red shirt haunt me so?" fiercely demanded the cowering wretch. "Go where I may, he follows. Even now, if I went a hundred yards from this shanty, I should see him. Who is he? What does he want? Who has set him upon me?"

"It is merely your imagination—"

"I know better. He is watching me, and I suspect that he is one of Draper's tools. Draper! Who is that man, and what does he want of me? My back is tender now from the lashing his men gave me that night in the canyon. I almost wish he had handed me over as he did the Absleys. They are out of their misery; his tools whipped me like a dog and then set me free. Free? There is delicious freedom in this life, with the man in the red shirt always dogging my steps. I would flee from here, but I feel that it would be useless. I am a marked man, and I should be followed, go where I might!"

He arose and began to pace to and fro. The force of his own words was apparent—"the curse of crime" was upon him—and for him there was no rest. Rufus spoke reassuringly, but his words passed unheeded. Suddenly the younger man paused.

"All this is the work of Draper," he said, "but who is he?"

Rufus shook his head.

"I don't know."

"An idea has occurred to me—one too wild to be considered, perhaps. We have seen Horace Brotherton's grave?"

"Yes."

"But we never saw his body?"

"No."

"Suppose that some one has deceived us and all the rest of the outside people—suppose that he is alive!"

Rufus started, and then shook his head.

"The idea is absurd. All the people of the Bar saw the body, and, besides, no one could go over that fall and live."

"What proof have we that Horace went over? Suppose that he fell, or was pushed, from the foot-bridge. There was one chance in a hundred that he might escape. Well, suppose he did escape, and then substitute another body for his own, as it were. Suppose that Draper is Horace Brotherton!"

"Absurd!" replied Rufus, but he glanced about uneasily.

"There is something familiar about that man's voice—I can't say what—but he terrifies me. I remember, once, that Uncle Horace told you that he relied upon you to be a father to Lucia."

If he should come back from the grave, how do you suppose he would like your fatherly care of her?"

"Come come!" cried Rufus, hastily, "don't let me hear any more of that. Your idea is absurd, from beginning to end. Of course Horace is dead. Do you suppose, if he was alive, that he would have dropped out of sight and left Lucia to fight for Montana Mill alone?"

"There is something to that," Adam acknowledged. "But Draper is helping her," he added.

"True, but you can't associate him with Horace. We have had enough of this idle talk, however. The question now is, are we going to make another effort in regard to Lucia?"

"I'm afraid to."

"Nonsense!"

"That Draper will be sure to appear. I believe the man in the red shirt to be his agent, and he will keep an eye on me and warn Draper."

"Evade the man in the red shirt."

"That's easier said than done. He hangs to me like a burr."

"You can either evade or kill him," Rufus declared, in a hard voice. "We are fairly launched in our work, and must not be fastidious. Come, shall we strike for Lucia?"

Adam still demurred, but, as usual, his father won the day. The latter had none of the half-superstitious fear which troubled his son, and he was reluctant to give up all hope of securing the fortune which would be Lucia's when Montana Mill was recovered.

With her in their power he believed she could be induced to marry Adam, and peace be restored between them.

Adam lacked this confidence and he feared to go near Bullion Bar again, but the elder man's arguments prevailed, and he agreed to follow his lead. Rufus took charge of all. The mysterious man in the red shirt did not dog his steps, so he was free to make preparations. He did this by engaging four horses and a stout fellow who was a village loafer and rough. He could be relied upon to do anything dishonorable.

The party left Wild Horse two hours before dark. Adam did not accompany the others, but an artifice was resorted to in order to throw the man in the red shirt off the track, and it had every appearance of success.

When Adam joined the others and went on in the hills, there was no sign of the spy.

He had evidently been outwitted.

They rode steadily toward Bullion Bar, and Rufus and Hammer Alf, their companion, talked very cheerfully. The former took little pleasure in this, but he wanted to rouse Adam from his gloomy mood. It was a vain attempt, however; he scarcely heard them, and had a habit of glancing back over his shoulder with a nervous start far from pleasant.

He had not forgotten the spy.

Darkness overtook them on the way, and it was not much short of midnight when they reached the vicinity of Bullion Bar. This point gained, they left their horses in a canyon and proceeded to finish their journey on foot.

Investigation indicated that all was favorable for their attempt. The Bar was not given to late hours, and not a light appeared to be burning in the whole place.

So they went on toward Barlow's house in silence, Rufus leading the way. Adam managed to get between the other two, for he felt safer there; in his opinion there was less danger of seeing Draper, or the man in the red shirt.

The house was reached and Hammer Alf's skill them came into use. He claimed to be a skillful housebreaker, and it was for him to effect an entrance. He made good all his claims by attacking and almost noiselessly forcing open a window.

The way was clear; it only remained to enter.

Rufus now took the lead, and he glided in scientifically. The others followed and the work was fairly begun.

Both the Brothertons knew the house well, and they found their way up-stairs without showing any more light than an occasional flash of the bull's-eye to make sure nothing was in the way.

When the upper floor was reached, the delicate work began. They believed they knew in which room to look for Lucia, but to get her out without giving an alarm was quite another matter. Barlow and his wife slept near at hand.

Rufus decided to investigate alone, and he took the lantern and glided to the door. All remained silent, and he cautiously turned the knob. The result was encouraging; the door was not fastened.

Slowly he opened it. All was dark and still beyond, save for what he believed to be the breathing of a sleeper. He crossed the threshold.

For a novice his nerves were remarkably good, and he turned his lantern and shot a ray of light toward the bed. Then a smile of triumph crossed his face; Lucia was there, and sleeping peacefully. At least, so it seemed.

He stepped back and drew a vial and sponge from his pocket. He was about to try the chloroform trick which had worked so well on a former occasion.

Deftly he saturated the sponge, and then re-

turned to the room. It was but a few steps to the bed, and he soon crossed this space. Then, once more, he moved the slide of the lantern to guide him in his work.

As he did so he recoiled.

The bed was vacant!

He wheeled in alarm, and a new fright awaited him. The door had been closed, and between him and it stood Lucia Brotherton, fully dressed, terribly wide-awake and stern-faced; while in her extended hand was a revolver which bore full upon him.

The aged villain recoiled and his face grew pale. All his bravery went like a flash, and in the role of a detected criminal, he became as weak as a child.

Lucia stretched out her disengaged hand dramatically.

"So this is how we meet again!" she said, in a low, yet thrilling voice.

His lips moved, but no sound came forth.

"You thought to abduct me again, I suppose," the girl went on, firmly, "but you have lamentably failed. You may as well put away your chloroform. I am master here, and I command you by virtue of this revolver!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

REDGRAVE, THE RENEGADE.

BROTHERTON put out his hand nervously.

"In mercy's name, turn that revolver aside!" he implored. "You may discharge it by accident, you know; you are a woman."

"And a dead shot!" Lucia steadily replied.

"But, my dear, I have come to explain—"

"You have explained already. Your secret entrance and the chloroform tell the whole story, but you are foiled at the start. I have lain down every night expecting something of this kind, and, always a light sleeper, I quickly aroused when you intruded here. Rufus Brotherton, you have lost my last grain of pity. This time your age shall not save you!"

Rufus felt very weak about the knees. Her voice was inexorable, and he knew that all his wily arguments would be thrown away upon her. He saw the jail staring him in the face, and all his courage oozed away.

At this moment there was a racket outside, and a sound as of some one running down the stairs.

"Barlow has discovered us!" said Rufus, shaking more than ever.

"Yes, and your accomplices will find themselves as bad off as you are," Lucia steadily answered.

Crack! crack!

It was the report of a revolver in the lower part of the house, and even Lucia began to be startled. This was more than she had counted upon.

Again the report, and then a human cry, as of pain and terror. Who had been shot? Was it Barlow, or one of the ruffians? Lucia grew pale, and, forgetting her prisoner, her revolver hand dropped to her side.

Rufus saw it, and he saw his chance. With an agile leap he sprang forward and seized her wrist. A moment more and the revolver was wrested away. Then the girl uttered a cry for help.

Brotherton uttered a furious exclamation and sprang at her like a wild animal. The strength of desperation was in his arm, and he hurled her away with great force. She struck against a projecting portion of the wall, reeled and fell to the floor.

Her assailant paused for no more. He thought only of his own safety, and, not daring to retreat through the house, he grasped a chair and demolished the window at one blow.

Then he sprang out and through.

Luck, however, had deserted him. As he went his heel caught on the window-sill, his hand slipped, and down he went, revolving like a wheel—down, down to what?

He disappeared, but Lucia still lay on the floor. Stunned by the force of the blow she had received, she lay in a heap as unconscious as the floor upon which she rested.

Hark! what sound is that which runs through the town?

"Fire! fire!"

Always a dreadful call, it fell that night upon the ears of the citizens, men and women, and brought them quickly out of their own houses. One house there seemed in a fair way of being reduced to ashes. It was in the grasp of the fire-fiend, and a red pillar mounted up the sky with a sinister hiss and glow.

"It is Lawyer Barlow's house!"

The cry spread, and all hastened to that point. The first to arrive were carrying out furniture, and others were trying to convey water from Black Run.

"Small hope," said a smoke-blackened man, and they recognized the lawyer, himself; "and I don't care so much as long as we're all saved."

And he stopped to caress one of his children.

"How did it happen?"

"Lamp burst."

"Your family is all out?"

"Yes."

"Hullo! what's this?"

One citizen had come upon a dark heap by

the side of the house. He saw that it was a man, and in dangerous proximity to the fire. He dragged it away, and the light fell full upon a white face.

Several exclamations arose from the crowd.

"Why, it's Rufus Brotherton!"

"And dead as a stone!"

"He wa'n't so bad, after all. He died trying to do good."

Lawyer Barlow did not overhear these words, nor did he know of this discovery. If he had done so, it might have been better for the living.

Nothing could help Rufus Brotherton then. His fall from the window had been instantly fatal, and there was the end of plotting and life for him. The body was borne away, and the attempt to subdue the flames more vigorously prosecuted.

Barlow was asked the cause of the fire.

"Burglars," he replied. "I discovered two in the house and gave them as many shots. Think I hit one. The other fired back and broke my lamp, and that fired the house. It's a wonder I escaped. No; I didn't recognize them. It isn't any use, boys; you can't save the house."

This seemed to be the fact. The flames had a good grasp, and were now lapping almost every part of the doomed edifice, while their means of fighting the fire were wholly inadequate.

They were standing there, nearly all idle, when a new-comer broke through the group, pushing them aside unceremoniously. Some resented his way, for they recognized Redgrave, the Renegade, but he was too athletic to make a quarrel desirable.

His heavy face was stern and scowling.

"Are all saved, Barlow?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Where is Lucia Brotherton?"

"Safe, no thanks to you," Barlow curtly replied.

"I say, where is she?"

The words were spoken in a terrible voice, and the glare of the renegade's eyes rather startled Barlow.

"I don't know," he answered. "Briggs saw her outside and safe."

"I said that I *thought* I did," amended Briggs, "but it proved to be the Whipple girl."

"Then where is Miss Brotherton?"

Redgrave shouted the words, fiercely grasping the lawyer's arm, and the latter's face grew pale.

"Can it be she was left in the house?" he gasped.

"We found old Rufus dead under her window," said a voice. "I'll bet that he made way with her and—"

Redgrave dashed Barlow aside violently, and rushed for the house door.

"Stop!" cried Sol Slade. "It's sure death-ter go in thar. You'll be burnt ter death, sure!"

But not a word passed Redgrave's lips. Unheeding the sheet of fire which blazed ahead of him, he dashed through the door and disappeared from sight.

"By ther eternal!" cried Slade, "I ain't goin' ter be outdid *this* time!"

He started boldly after, but as he crossed the threshold a wall of flame surged into his face, and he reeled back, turned, tried to flee, stumbled and fell safely outside. He picked himself up and wiped his singed beard.

"Anybody that hankers fur that can go it," he observed; "but I've got enough. You kin be composin' an epituff fur Redgrave, fur he's a gone coon. He'll never come out alive!"

Such was the opinion of all. It seemed impossible for any one to live in that furnace, and the people stood by and commented on his singular sacrifice in hushed voices. This was the second time he had put his life in desperate peril for Lucia, and it was the general verdict that he had made amends with his life for his treachery when she was robbed of Montana Mill.

"I'm afeerd we've been too hard on him," said an old miner, shaking his head.

"He's better off now."

"Yas, an' he wouldn't a-lived long, anyhow. He was failin' fast."

"What I'm sorriest about is ther gal. She was ez good ez they make 'em—"

The speaker paused. A strange object had dashed out of the door, all ablaze, but, suddenly, a quilt was thrown off and they saw Redgrave with Lucia in his arms. The covering had almost wholly saved them from the fire, and it seemed that only the rescuer's hands had suffered.

One moment the crowd was silent, and then a cheer went up which echoed far and near.

Lucia was saved, and their joy knew no bounds.

Redgrave was reeling with his burden, but he handed her to Lot Peterson and then turned to Barlow.

"She has only fainted," he said, "and proper care will soon revive her. I will now go home, for I hate to be robbed of my sleep. Good-night!"

And he strode away without once looking back.

"Didn't I say he was crazy ez a March hare?"

demanding Slade. "I never seen no sech man. He rushes inter that blazin' furnace, an' then gits mightily worried fur fear he will lose his sleep! B'gosh! he's clean gone in his upper story!"

There were others who thought so, but the chief interest now centered in Lucia. Doctor Rowe at once gave his attention, and he gave it as his opinion that she would prove wholly uninjured unless she had drawn fire or smoke into her lungs in dangerous quantities.

She was promptly conveyed to the house of friends.

The discovery of Rufus Brotherton's body was now commented upon, and the theory of burglars gave place to one that this had been an attack of Lucia's enemies. Briggs had seen them in retreat, but had not been able to identify them.

"There were three of them," he announced. "Two came out of the house, and as they hurried away a third man followed. He must have been cooler than they, for he did not seem to try to overtake them, but kept about so far behind. This man had on a red shirt!"

Neither Briggs nor his hearers saw anything peculiar about the last statement, but if Rufus Brotherton's deaf ears could have heard it would have been different with him.

Barlow's house was doomed, yet, just as the roof fell in, a cheer arose from the crowd. They thought they had good reason for doing this—word had just come that Lucia had recovered and was wholly uninjured.

"Safe again, and again saved by Redgrave!" muttered Barlow. "This is most singular; he will take any risk for her. She owes much of trouble to him, and he has twice saved her life. It sounds harsh to call him a renegade!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BLACK SHARK SPEAKS PLAINLY.

The following day Jake Sharkey sat in the jail gnawing at his fingers like a dog devouring a bone, and glowering at vacancy. His guard was the same as before—the jailer, his dog and a revolver—and two of the trio kept sharp watch upon the prisoner.

Jake was far from happy, for his fancy conjured up all possible and impossible calamities as likely to result from his incarceration. He knew his deserts and feared that justice would be done.

Twice he had sent word to Paul Redgrave to come and see him. The first call had been totally ignored, and he was awaiting the result of the second.

Fear and the spirit of revenge were struggling in his deformed heart. He believed that Redgrave could save him if he would, and was determined to be revenged if his efforts failed. If he went to ruin Redgrave should go, too.

The answer came to his call. This time Redgrave did not ignore it, but the reply made the boatman turn white with wrath and fear.

"Tell Sharkey that I will not see him!"

That was all. Terse, curt, and, as he regarded it, insolent, Redgrave had made answer at once, and the prisoner saw his last hope fade away.

He said nothing until the messenger went away—he could not find words—but when his wits returned a little he stormed in a way which made his human guard hold his revolver ready, and caused the dog to growl suspiciously. Sharkey, however, was not yet at the end of his rope. He thought awhile, and then sent word to Lawyer Barlow that he wanted to see him on vitally important business.

This call was not disregarded, for Barlow was too wide-awake to let any possible chance slip. He was soon in the presence of the restless, glowering Shark, who brightened up perceptibly.

"Well, my man," Barlow briskly said, "is there anything new to-day?"

"Thar is, fur sure."

"I'll willingly hear it."

"Yer Honor, I ain't done no great crime, hev I? Ther breakin' an' enterin' kin be overlooked ef I kin earn ther right ter be forgiven, can't they?"

"Well, that depends."

"Depends on what?"

"If we can agree—"

"We can. I give ye ther straight fact that we can. No doubt as ter that. Ther hull business is, will ye set me free ef I kin tell enough ter earn freedom?"

"Certainly."

"Then send out that hyena."

The Black Shark made a gesture toward the jailer, and though the latter expressed a desire to "punch the head" of the speaker for thus referring to him, Jake had his way. He was soon alone with Barlow. Then he came to the point with commendable promptness.

"Yer Honor, ye know I'm a fish-man?"

"Yes."

"Wal, it sometimes happens that when I go ter fishin' I git so absorbed in ther problem o' how I'm ter git my bread an' butter—I'm a very poor man—that I stay out a bit after dark. This happened the night Horace Brotherton went over ther dam."

He paused and looked significantly at Barlow, who at once showed new interest.

"Go on!" he directed.

"When I left off fishin', I raised my anchor an' let ther boat drift. Nat'rally, it went toward ther dam, an' thus it was that I seen somethin'."

"What was it?"

"First, I seen a man walk out on ther foot-bridge from ther south side."

"Who was it?" Barlow eagerly asked.

"'Twas so dark I couldn't see, but thar I set while ther boat drifted, an' watched him, wonderin' why he couldn't a-hired me ter row him over. Wal, he had got about half-way when somethin' dark riz up in his path. I seen it was a man, an' knowed he had been crouchin' on the foot-bridge."

"Ah! Go on!"

"Up ter that time I had never suspected that mischief was afloat, but all o' a sudden ther crouchin' man ketched a-holt of ther t'other one, who uttered a shrill cry. 'Stop!' he sez, in a scared way, 'fur Heaven's sake, let go, Redgrave—'"

Sharkey paused and looked intently at Barlow.

"Did he say that?" the lawyer asked.

"He did, fur sure."

"What next?"

"That was all he had time ter say. Ther second man didn't let up a bit, but give him a fling right out toward ther dam, an' ther fust man went down with a yell. Another second and thar was but one man on ther bridge, an' all was still ez ther grave 'ceptin' ez ther fall roared."

Barlow's face was singularly excited for him.

"What next?" he asked, quickly.

"I knowed murder had been done," pursued Sharkey, "but I didn't know who had been killed. O' course I was shocked, an' ez ther red-handed assassinator moved toward the north bank I ketched up my oars an' rowed ter head him off, but I had too much ground ter kiver. He got clean away; I didn't see him. Then I went home, wonderin' who had been used so wicked. Next mornin' ther body o' Horace Brotherton was took from ther water below ther falls."

The boatman paused and looked at Barlow. His regard was returned with all the keenness of which the lawyer was master.

"Is this true, Sharkey?" he asked.

"I swear it."

"Why didn't you tell your story before?"

"I wanted ter keep out of it, altergether."

"You say the victim cried: 'Stop! For Heaven's sake, let go, Redgrave—'"

"That's jest what he did yell."

"Did you see the assassin's face?"

"No."

"Or recognize him any other way?"

"No."

"The victim may have made a mistake in his slayer's identity. The latter may not have been Redgrave at all."

"He's been payin' me right well ter keep ther secret fur nigh a year, all ther same."

"Redgrave has been paying you?"

"Yes. I charged him with ther deed, an' he never once denied it. He didn't admit nothin', but promptly agreed ter give me so much ter keep my mouth shut."

"And has been paying you ever since?"

"Yas."

"Then why do you give him away now? You are not the man to kill a goose that lays a golden egg, Sharkey."

"Durn ther goose! He's gone back on me. When I found myself inter this trouble I sent fur Redgrave, thinkin' he would git me out by hook or crook. He wouldn't pay no attention, so I sent ag'in. He answered that he wouldn't come nigh me. That settled it, an' I made up my mind ter make terms with you."

Barlow saw the point then, and it was an important discovery. Interest in Horace Brotherton's death had nearly died out, but it only remained to tell this new story and the citizens of the Bar would be wide awake in a moment. The lawyer had never really believed Redgrave guilty, but this story put a new aspect on the case.

He questioned Sharkey further, drawing out every point that he could, and then proceeded to map out a plan for the future. He did not propose to spread the story at once, having in mind a more dramatic revelation, and he inwardly chuckled as he saw himself winning his great case in handsome style. Montana Mill was as good as recovered, he believed.

Sharkey had not miscalculated. Barlow agreed to entirely overlook his burglarious work if he would keep silent until his testimony was wanted, and the boatman as readily promised to do so.

Just as the lawyer was leaving another prisoner was brought in, and he experienced new elation as he saw that it was Adam Brotherton. The latter looked as though he had seen hard usage, and all his courage was gone. The local officer who committed him placed him in a corner opposite to Sharkey, added one man to the guard, and the work was done.

"You've done well," Barlow then said to the officer, "but I didn't know you were working for us."

"Nor have I been," was the frank reply. "You are at liberty to clap your charge onto Brotherton, but another charge has the precedence. This man is the accuser."

He pointed to the new guard—a man who wore a red shirt. Barlow had before noticed that he was a stranger, and a solid-looking man. He had a broad, grim face, and an air of conscious power which was all the more impressive because kept within bounds.

"Who is he?" the lawyer asked.

"Gave the name of Ralston, and said the charge was assault with intention to kill. He captured Adam himself, and brought him in. 'That's all I know, but I thought it was a good chance to bottle him up to await your charge.'"

"Excellent! and I will see that the fellow gets his deserts. The man in the red shirt has done us quite a favor. What does he say about the assault on himself?"

"Next to nothing, but he gives one the impression that he is a man who knows what he is about."

This analysis seemed about correct, for the man in the red shirt settled down in the jail and proceeded to give all his attention to watching Adam. The real jailer would have been sociable, but he made poor headway. The stranger answered only in monosyllables, and showed a strong antipathy to all kinds of conversation.

His strong, steady eyes hardly ever turned away from Adam, and the latter covered before them like one destitute of all nerve and muscle.

He was in a most pitiable condition, and even Jake Sharkey felt contempt for him. But Jake did not know all. He did not know how Adam had been mercilessly followed by the man in the red shirt; nor how he had tried repeatedly to throw him off the track, only to see him reappear at the most inopportune moment to arrest his flight and ruin his plans of safety.

Adam had a more than natural fear of that grim man. Who was he? Why had he hunted him down? What did he want? Those terrible eyes seemed to pierce him now, and Adam shivered and felt an ice-like coldness upon him. Was the person in the red shirt a mere man or a demon? Terribly frightened, worn out bodily, beset by countless fears and hunted down, Adam was wretched and hopeless.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE END OF THE MONTANA MILL CASE.

It was the day of the new trial, Brotherton vs. Stamford, and Lawyer Barlow was cheerful and smiling. He regarded the case as being as good as won, and told Lucia as much. At her invitation he had moved into her own house after his was burned down, and she seemed to have fully recovered from the experience of that night.

Hers was an elastic nature, physically and mentally, and she bore her trials with courage which delighted the resolute lawyer.

All Bullion Bar was wrought up by the great legal fight, and not a man labored that day except those directly concerned in the case. There was too much outside interest.

It was generally expected that Miss Brotherton would win, but the Stamford faction showed no sign of weakening. Cephas relied upon possession, a clear deed, and Thomas Eames to save him. The latter had all this while been living at Bullion Bar, and had won the respect of nearly all, while Mr. Jack Wells had done nothing of the kind.

He was a jolly fellow, and those of convivial nature liked him, but he had imbibed altogether too much liquor to be a favorite with the better class.

Everybody went to the trial except Adam Brotherton and the man in the red shirt. They remained in the jail, and the miserable prisoner cowered as before under the gaze of those terrible eyes.

They never left him; he saw them always. Even if he closed his own eyes his imagination pictured the others staring relentlessly at him.

Over at the court-room all was of interest. Judge Brazer presided. He was a man who had had no experience in law until he came to Bullion Bar in its early days. One day he was made judge in a trivial case, and had held the position ever since. Some of the new-comers wanted a more learned man in his place, but he had too strong a hold on the affections of the people. He went serenely on, pleasing the common people with his honesty, and often shocking the lawyers with his disregard of legal forms and usages.

But he ruled absolutely, nevertheless.

He opened the court with a speech which referred more to the Fourth of July than to anything else—a habit of his—and then turned to Barlow and tersely said:

"Fire away!"

Perhaps no Eastern judge would have used the expression but Brazer did, and then he settled back to give the others a fair chance.

Barlow improved his opportunity, and gave a succinct account of the case. It was a fight for the property known as Montana Mill. Brotherton against Stamford. Both parties claimed it, having bought and paid for it. Each held a deed to prove this. Brotherton had purchased

of one John Wells; Stamford had bought of Thomas Eames. Wells and Eames had been former owners. Of the two, one, and only one, had a right to sell, he having bought out his partner.

Which was this one? Each claimed to have been the purchaser, and each had a deed to prove, or try to prove, the fact. Clearly, one of these deeds was a forgery. Which was it? This was for the jury to decide, and with their decision would go the case. If they decided that Eames had bought of Wells, Stamford would hold the property; but if they found that Wells had purchased Eames's half, all the property would become Lucia Brotherton's.

Mr. Barlow proposed to show for his client that she was the legal owner of Montana Mill.

Miss Brotherton was called to the stand. She testified that her father, Horace Brotherton, had bought the mill in good faith of John Wells, who claimed to own the whole thereof, and that all legal formalities had been complied with.

Wells was the next witness. He stood up, fat, jolly and confident, and smiled good-humoredly upon everybody. Barlow could see that he had been drinking, but not enough to make matters serious. He promised to be a good witness.

He was a long time on the stand, and Stamford's lawyer put him through a determined course of questioning. The witness answered everything, and as he talked he smiled upon the rival lawyer as though that gentleman had been his best friend, while his jovial air and occasional bursts of wit captured all.

Barlow was more than delighted. His fears in regard to Wells vanished, and he felt that Eames would have hard work to make a better impression.

When Wells sat down the case seemed to be leaning in favor of Lucia Brotherton decidedly.

Jake Sharkey was the next man called. No one could expect him to make a good impression, but he had his story to tell and he told it—one-half, at least. Barlow had decided to reserve the story of Horace Brotherton's death until later; the first thing on the programme was the story of how the boatman had been hired to steal the Wells deed.

He told how Alicia had come to him and made the bargain, and under Barlow's skillful handling the impression was given that she had merely been acting as an agent for her father.

The idea was also thrown out that the Stamfords must have a very weak case, or they would never have stooped to steal the other deed.

Barlow eyed the jury and smiled. Thus far all had gone to his liking. Even Sharkey seemed to gain respectability on the stand, and as he adhered firmly to his story despite all the efforts of opposing counsel, another good point was scored.

The case seemed about won.

The Stamfords then had their inning. Cephas showed that he had properly purchased the mill, and Eames was called to show that he could properly have sold it.

Unluckily for Eames and his side, Barlow had more shrewdness than all the opposition, and while the witness began excellently, the crafty lawyer managed to get him confused, and involved him in several contradictions. When he sat down everybody knew that he had not made a success, whether he was honest or not.

Stamford was recalled, and, together with Redgrave and Alicia, he denied all knowledge of the story Sharkey had told. Alicia positively swore that she had never spoken with Sharkey, much less hired him to steal the deed.

The next witnesses testified as to the character of Sharkey, and the doings of Wells since his coming to the Bar were appropriately commented upon. All this was against them, but Barlow did not worry. He knew the tide was going in favor of the Brotherton faction.

At this point the court adjourned for dinner, and Barlow took advantage of the fact to speak with Brazer.

"Judge," said he, "I have one more witness; an important one; but for good reasons I hate to call him, unless absolutely necessary. If I can safely hold him back I can clear up a new crime, and give you the prettiest case you ever had. Now, what I want is this: May I hold him back until Stamford's lawyer and I have made our closing arguments, and then use him or not, as I see fit? True, it is a bit irregular—"

"Not in the least," the judge interrupted. "That's all *au fait*, as they say in French, in this court. Hold him in, and then if Stephens downs you, slip his tether and use him. It'll be all right."

This was better than Barlow had dared hope, and he resolved to withhold his charge against Redgrave if possible. He wanted the glory of having him arrested afterward, and not mix the two cases.

Once more in court he began his plea, and another like it had never been heard in Bullion Bar. As a witness expressed it, "Barlow jest let himself loose like a cyclone, an' tore up their whole country."

He did tear up the case of the Stamfords, and

there was but little left when he finished. He made the most of the contradictions into which he had forced Eames, and before he was through he had pictured him as a perjurer and forger in a way which almost frightened Eames out of his wits.

As for the Stamfords, he utterly demolished them. In a thrilling, florid style he asked the jury to imagine them trying to win on a wicked claim, with forgers and perjurers to aid them, and, finding their hope but a desperate one, hiring a low ruffian to steal the genuine deed in the Wells and Eames sale.

Was not this a confession of weakness and guilt?

Before he was through Barlow knew that he had made his point, and that Stamford's lawyer might argue until time grew old, and he could not break down the wall which hemmed in the Brotherton claim. It was invincible.

"It's all over but the hurrahing," he said, to Lucia, as he sat down and wiped his flushed face. "I defy them to beat us now."

Stephens rose, but his face was gloomy. He felt that he might as well remain silent. He believed that he had an honest case, and that Jake Sharkey had lied, but it was the boatman's story, burnished up by Barlow, which had ruined all.

He opened his mouth to speak, but remained silent.

There was a disturbance at one side, and a voice arose audible to all.

"Lemme through! I hev more ter say. I'm a witness, an' I wanter witness. Lemme tell more!"

Barlow looked, and his heart leaped suddenly. The disturber was Wells, and it needed but one glance from his keen eyes to see that Wells was drunk. He had improved his time since testifying, and this was the result.

"Your Honor," cried Barlow, "please remove that man. We are through with him, and we—"

"Lemme testify!" cried Wells; "I have more ter tell."

"Step up here and tell it!" thundered the judge. "Be mighty quick about it, and then get out!"

Barlow still demurred, but Stephens began to get an idea, and he as stoutly insisted that Wells should talk. There was a wrangle, during which Wells, stood wobbling around on the stand, far gone in the melancholy stage of drunkenness—so far gone that the tears coursed freely down his cheeks and he whimpered like a boy.

Judge Brazer had said that he should testify, and he said so again in tones audible almost in Cottonwood Camp. Unheeding Barlow's remonstrance against listening to a drunken man, he ordered everybody to be silent and let Wells say what he wished.

Wells said it.

"Whimpering, weeping, wobbling painfully, yet talking plainly, he spoke as follows:

"I'm a wicked wretch, and I'm sorry for it, but I've got a quickened conscience, and it won't let me wander any longer in the paths of wickedness. I see the error of my ways, and I'm going to reform. I've been an awful wicked man, but I hope to be forgiven."

Barlow noticed with new alarm that the man's rude language vanished. What did that portend? The judge now saw fit to interrupt.

"Come right to the point!" he ordered.

"I've been lying here," resumed Wells, sobbing and wiping away his tears. "Eames told the truth and I didn't. His deed is genuine, and mine a forgery. I sold out all my interest to him and got my pay, and when I sold to Brotherton I didn't own a dollar in Montana Mill. I wrote both deeds. I'm an educated man to a certain degree, and the deeds are in my hand. When I've been asked to write in Bullion Bar this time, I made wretched work of it on purpose. The bogus deed I drew up to make folks in Leadville think I owned property here, and I never thought of using it otherwise until a few days ago. I never had any right to Montana Mill after Eames bought me out, and no right to sell to Brotherton. If Stamford bought of Eames, the mill is his. Judge, I'm a wicked wretch, and my conscience troubles me sorely, and—"

Here the pitiable, whimpering wretch broke down and wept even harder, while Stephens sprung to his feet.

"Your Honor, I'm ready for the jury to take this case!"

"I am not!" cried Barlow. "I object to having the words of a drunken man used here—"

"He's your witness," interrupted Brazer, "and what he says goes for what it's worth. Barlow, you're a fool to fight this further. Wells has owned up, and unless you want to be arrested as accessory, or whatever you call it, you'd better throw up the sponge. Gentlemen of the jury, you can take this case. All the charge I've got for you is this: I believe Wells has at last told the truth; you can believe what you see fit."

Barlow dropped into his chair, his face pale and downcast. Peremptory and wrong-headed as Brazer was, the lawyer felt that a further fight would be folly. The despicable, blubbering wretch who had lied so boldly when sober

had told the truth in his cups, and though he might possibly stay proceedings even with Brazer on the bench, the truth was out, and Wells would be forced to tell the truth when sober.

No use now to present the testimony he had kept back—the case was hopelessly lost.

The doubts he had always felt in regard to Wells had resolved themselves into shape.

The jury did not leave their seats, but, in less than three minutes, a verdict was reached. They found that neither Wells nor Lucia Brotherton could claim Montana Mill, but that it was Cephas Stamford's by every legal right. Recommending that he pay Miss Brotherton for improvements while her father run it, the foreman suggested that the judge discharge them, as he, the foreman, had an engagement.

They were discharged, and the case was lost and won.

Lucia was far calmer than Barlow. He made his way to Brazer's side, leveled one finger at weeping Mr. Jack Wells, and indignantly exclaimed:

"I demand that that fellow be given the extent of the law as a perjurer!"

"B'gosh," said the judge, "he'll get it to the last card in the pack!"

And this was the end of the Montana Mill case.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALICIA STRIKES THE DECISIVE BLOW.

THERE was joy and sorrow in Bullion Bar that night. Lucia Brotherton bore up under the blow wonderfully well, but her heart was heavy. She had hoped to win the case, turn Montana Mill into ready money, and forever leave a place where she had met with so much trouble. Now she was left almost penniless.

Barlow was a very mad man. It would have been bad enough if Wells had made his break sooner, but to have it come at the very moment of success was a terrible blow. He felt like going on the war-path and personally chastising the fellow, but as this was hardly up to his level of dignity, he intended to have him punished by law as heavily as was possible.

He had one card left to play, and he hoped to succeed better when he had Redgrave arrested for killing Horace Brotherton. The arrest would have come at once, but the lawyer felt that he needed a little time to recover his nerve, and the watch set upon Stamford's house would prevent Redgrave's escape, if he meditated such a step.

Over at Stamford's was a different picture. All were elated there, and even Redgrave condescended to smile. Bradlock Cowles bubbled with humor; Cephas brought out wine for all and drank a good deal, himself; and Alicia was as lighted-hearted as a kitten.

She even confessed in her joy that she had hired Sharkey to rob Barlow's safe—a fact before unknown to any other person in the household. She had done so because she feared all would not go well at the trial. Stamford was not at all pleased to hear how she had interfered, but, as all had resulted well, he condescended to let it pass without a word of censure. Redgrave observed that Alicia came near ruining all, but she merely gave him an angry glance in reply.

"One thing is sure," said Stamford, in conclusion, "we need have no fear of further trouble. No lawyer in the world would reopen the case after the events of to-day, and Montana mill is ours for all time to come."

It was a very consoling thought, for, whatever his past follies and crimes, he had been honest enough in his dealings in regard to the mill. He had bought it in good faith, and though somewhat severe in his ejection of the Brothertons, had always believed his cause just.

It was late before the family circle broke up to retire.

Cowles was the first to go, but while on his way to his own room he was met by Bess. There was a new glow in her dark eyes, and she stopped him.

"I want to see you," she said. "Come in here."

It was a spare room, and when he entered, the bookkeeper found a light burning. Bess faced him with eyes that glittered still more—with triumph, it seemed.

"You know what you have told me," she said.

"I have told you a good deal," Cowles replied, smiling.

"I mean more particularly about the papers you wanted—those I found in Meg Warner's old dress, and then had taken forcibly from me by Jake Sharkey."

"And the same for which I one night attacked, overpowered and searched Jake. I know. He said he had lost them."

"Yes, and ever since you told me I have been searching for them. I thought from what he said that they must have been lost by the north bank of the river, and that if no one else had found them they were still among the rocks. Ever since the snow began to go I have been searching there, and I have my reward at last. In a crevice among the rocks, where the wind

doubtless blew it, I found the package, little damaged by the winter storms."

She held it toward him as she spoke—the same package Sharkey had wrested from her that night when she first discovered it.

He read the inscription with a brightening face:

"Stolen by Margaret Warner, August 12, 1865."

"Bravo, Bessie!" Cowles exclaimed, "you have done well. I don't know what these papers prove, but your part has been nobly done. You are a good, true girl, and you shall never be sorry for your devotion to me."

He held out his arms and she crept to their shelter. For the wild, moody girl of the cabin had been tamed before then; her heart had been given to this gay young man, and he was all the world to her.

Neither of them knew then that other eyes were upon them; they did not know that just beyond the door Alicia watched with blazing eyes and nervously working fingers, the nails of which cut into her delicate flesh. Had they seen that fair face, now distorted with passion, they would have been startled, but they saw nothing, suspected nothing, and their lips met in a kiss.

"You have not looked at the papers!" said Bess.

"I can do so later."

"I want to tell you now what is in them."

"Go on, dear," answered Cowles smiling.

"One paper is a copy of the will of Cephas Stamford's father."

"Yes."

"There are several papers which relate to Ralph Stamford, brother of Cephas."

"Yes."

"Did you know that Ralph left a son?"

"Yes. Do they say what became of that son? I am unable to trace him, though I would like to do so. Sharkey gave me an account which represented that the boy was dead, having been stolen by Meg Warner and thrown into a mountain canyon to die. Do you know if he is alive?"

"There is nothing here to tell, but one other thing is told. It is marked 'Meg Warner's Confession,' and was written just before she fled from our house. What do you suppose it is? Did you know that Ralph Stamford had a daughter as well as a son?"

"A daughter? Great Scott, no! Is that a fact?"

"So the confession says, and it states that the child was born just before Ralph's wife died, which may be the reason no one here knew of its existence. Now, what do you suppose became of that child?"

"Does the confession tell?"

"Yes. Meg Warner stole it and brought it to Jake Sharkey's cabin. Jake was away, but his wife, Meg's old friend, was at home, caring for her own sick child. That night the child died. Mrs. Sharkey was frightened, for her husband had been greatly pleased in his way with the babe, and he would blame her for its death. But he never knew of it. Pleased as he had been with the child he had never taken it in his arms, and Meg Warner suggested that he would never know the difference if the live child was substituted for the dead one. This was done; Sharkey did not detect the change, and Ralph Stamford's daughter became Sharkey's daughter."

A deep breath from the watching woman at the door—a breath which was almost a gasp—and an exclamation from Bradlock Cowles.

"Is it possible?" he cried. "Then you—you—"

"I am that child," Bess answered.

"And Ralph Stamford's daughter!"

He caught her again in his arms, exultantly adding:

"Now let Ralph's son go where he will; you will do far better. You are the heiress! Montana Mill is recovered, but not for Cephas. All is yours—yours, my dear girl! You are the heiress of all!"

"Bradlock Cowles, you lie!"

It was a hissing voice at one side, and they turned to see Alicia. She trembled like a leaf, her face was very pale, and one hand was pressed over her heart. But her face was starting in its exhibition of passion and hate.

"Your plot is a fine one," she added, "but it will not work. Before you shall touch the Stamford fortune I will kill you both. Oh, traitor! traitor! I wonder you don't fall dead at my feet!"

Her violence startled Bess, but Cowles put her quietly behind him, out of harm's way.

"You are excited, Mrs. Redgrave," he said, coolly.

"Why shouldn't I be excited, you villain? You have professed to care—to love—me, and now I find you whimpering over this miserable girl. I suppose it is because you have found out that she is rich, or think you have, but it is all a lie. Ralph Stamford's daughter! A likely story, indeed! She is lying, but if she were ten thousand times his daughter, she should never live to claim the fortune. She and you shall never have it, traitor!"

Vehement and wild was this long speech, but

Bradlock's voice arose at the end as calmly as ever:

"You may as well know the truth, Mrs. Redgrave. I have occupied a false position in your household—how false you will understand, perhaps, when I say that I came here as a detective!"

Alicia dropped into a chair, and then sat staring mutely at the speaker as he went serenely on:

"My father is one of the best-known detectives in the West, but when I would have embraced his calling he said that I was too light-headed and frivolous. I determined to prove to the contrary. Having heard that Cephas Stamford was holding property which would be another's if Ralph Stamford's son could be found, I set out to find that son. I have not done so, but here is Ralph's daughter, and she is the heiress!"

"It is false—false!" gasped Alicia.

She looked miserably; her hand was still over her heart, and her pallor was startling.

"When I came to this house," continued Cowles, "it was to find certain papers which I believed Cephas Stamford possessed. They were in his safe. How was I to get them? I believed I saw my way, and set out to make a cat's-paw of you. You know the result; you helped me rob the safe, and only that the papers were at once stolen from us, all would have been well for me."

"Villain! villain!" muttered the wretched woman.

"I feel that my course has been a trifle less than upright," he resumed, "but I am not so bad as you think. Mrs. Redgrave, you think I have been your partner in giving arsenic to your husband. You never made a greater error in your life. When I suspected your infamous purpose I determined to foil you, but, at the same time, allow you to think me your faithful ally, and that the work was going on as you wished."

"Woman, I gave you what purported to be arsenic, but it was the simplest of substitutes; it was only chalk. Your ignorance in regard to the drug prevented you from seeing that the substitute lacked the proper body. Thus I deceived you, and, at the same time, protected Paul Redgrave. Don't glance so fearfully at Bess—she was introduced here as my ally, and, ever since the night she caught you drugging Paul's drinking-water, has known the truth. I silenced her by telling all about the poisoning case, after which she gladly helped me."

"Traitor! traitor!" again murmured Alicia.

"In one sense of the word I suppose I am that, but my conscience is easy; I believe any detective would have done the same. At any rate, I have saved Redgrave."

"Don't be so sure of that!" cried Alicia, arousing, and speaking wildly. "I had become tired of the slow work of what you gave me, and yesterday I went to an Indian doctor and got a swift poison. I have given it to Redgrave, and even now he may be dead. At any rate, his fate is sealed—I shall triumph over him, at least!"

"Once more you are wrong, woman!"

It was a new voice, and they turned to see Redgrave, himself, near the door, tall, erect and stern.

"You are foiled, after all, Alicia," he said, in a voice perfectly free from passion; "I have swallowed no drug. Neither have I been the blind fool you took me to be. All along I have known of your plot, though I confess that until now I believed Cowles as guilty as you. I am glad to find he is not. I have not even swallowed the chalk. I detected your deadly pit and avoided it. My illness has been but a pretense; my facial signs of illness were all caused by something I applied to my face. I have thrown the Indian doctor's drug away, and am to-night in as good health as ever before."

He ceased speaking, and there was a brief silence.

Redgrave's gaze rested full upon his guilty wife, but it was calm and grave.

As for her, if she had been dying of the deadly drug, she could not have looked more wretched.

Paul turned to the bookkeeper.

"You and I have been playing strange cards, Cowles," he resumed, quietly, "and I thought you a scoundrel, but I am glad it is otherwise. It is enough that this woman is so evil at heart. So this girl claims to be Ralph Stamford's daughter? Well, if she can prove it she shall have my help to enjoy her own."

"We hold the papers here, Mr. Redgrave," said Cowles.

"They are not worth a straw—unless I except Meg Warner's confession."

"How do you know?"

"I hold the genuine papers—yours are but copies. Cowles, do you remember the night you robbed Cephas Stamford's safe?"

"Yes," was the nervous reply.

"I was the person who robbed you in turn. I wanted the papers as much as you did, and I secured them. The open outer door was but a blind."

Cowles looked the astonishment he felt, but Bess suddenly sprung away.

"Mrs. Redgrave!" she exclaimed; "she is ill!"

Cowles saw that Alicia's eyes were closed and her face very white. He went forward quickly, impressed with a sudden idea, and lifted her wrist. One moment he kept his hand there, and then turned gravely to Bess and Redgrave.

"She is done with earthly ills," he said. "This excitement has proved too much for her. Let her sins be forgotten from this hour, for she is dead!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

REDGRAVE'S FAREWELL.

THE following morning Lot Peterson brought news to Lucia. Alicia Redgrave was dead. Heart disease, Doctor Rowe ascribed her end to, brought to a climax by the exciting scenes of the day.

It is to be feared that Lot did not mourn for her greatly, but no one ever heard Lucia speak harshly of the erring woman.

Miss Brotherton, however, was not prepared for what followed, and, half an hour later, she was both surprised and startled when Paul Redgrave walked unannounced into her presence. He removed his hat and spoke before she could form her own course of conduct.

"I beg your pardon for this intrusion," he said, gravely, "but I have come on matters of great importance. This document is for you."

He laid an open paper in her hand, and she mechanically glanced at it.

"A deed of Montana Mill," she murmured, "giving all to me, and signed by James Stamford. I do not understand. Who is James Stamford?"

"He is the nephew of Cephas Stamford, son of Ralph Stamford, real possessor of all Cephas has so long held, and, until this morning, owner of Montana Mill. He has done an act of justice and deeded you the mill!"

"Then why does he not come here and say so?" Lucia mechanically asked, for she felt dazed.

"He is here to say so."

"Where?"

"Here! I am James Stamford!"

Lucia looked utterly dumfounded.

"You!—you?" she stammered.

"Even so. You have known me as Paul Redgrave, but the last name was assumed by my father when the injustice of his brother, and his father's harshness, forced him to go out in the world and begin life anew. His father ultimately made what recompense he could, and willed his property to my father, but it came too late. My father was dead, and the executors of the will were unable to trace his family, nor did they ever learn that he once passed as Ralph Redgrave."

For a moment the speaker paused, and then he gravely added:

"In a few days I say farewell, forever, to America, and I trust that you will listen patiently while I make an explanation which may make me seem less of a villain in your estimation."

"Willingly!" Lucia murmured.

"I have but a word to say in regard to our lives before we came to Bullion Bar. Only you and I, of all here, know that when we were mere children we were secretly married, or that you as secretly obtained a divorce from me."

"Do not speak of it!" said the girl, with a shiver. "In those days I was quick-tempered and jealous—I was all to blame."

"Not so," Redgrave gravely replied. "I too, was passionate, and, at times, sullen, also. Over-sensitive in regard to the sneers your family leveled at my mother, I did my share to make the trouble which ended in our divorce. But, let all that pass."

"I continued with your father after that, and, as you know, came to Bullion Bar. I served faithfully until the time when Cephas Stamford suddenly appeared and claimed the mill. Now, let me explain why I turned renegade then."

"When he presented his case to me I sincerely believed that he had justice on his side, and would hold the mill—unless it could be proved that his case was a mass of lies. Believing that there might be crookedness about it, I resolved to enter his service, look for such crookedness, and unmask him if I could."

"Secondly, I promptly recognized him, by means of his name, as my own uncle, though I had never before been able to learn where he lived. I was, however, satisfied that he had done great injustice to my father, and that, as he did not suspect my identity—he never knew that my father once figured as Ralph Redgrave—I might, by entering his house, obtain justice."

"To accomplish these two ends I became Redgrave, the Renegade, daring all opprobrium. And I certainly got a full share. I bore it, however, and simulated a sullen, morose manner."

"Now, as to what followed. My name has been mentioned as the possible slayer of your father—"

"I long ago ceased to believe it," interrupted Lucia. "I was nervous, excited and unjust."

when I made the charge. I do not believe it now."

"I thank you, and all the more so because I can now name the real assassin."

Lucia grew pale.

"Did my father, indeed, die by foul play?"

"He did, and at the hand of a relative. The slayer is now in Bullion Bar jail."

"Do you mean Adam Brotherton?" the girl cried.

"I do. He it was who pushed Horace Brotherton from the foot-bridge to his death. He was then in Bullion Bar, though supposed to be far away, and he did the deed hoping to marry you and thus get your property. Your father was an obstacle, and he was first removed. When suspicion pointed at me I engaged detectives, and one of them, Ralston—a man who wears a red shirt; you may have seen him—has hunted the criminal down. The proof is overwhelming."

"One word," exclaimed Lucia. "Who is Ezekiel Draper?"

"Draper," was the slow reply, "and I am one! I assumed this disguise in order to work for you, and a natural gift as an actor enabled me to hide my identity. Yes, I am Draper!"

"Then what do I not owe you?" Lucia cried. "You saved me from the flood and from the fire and several times saved me in the character of Draper."

"I hoped to make amends for my treachery."

"Your 'treachery'! Do not call it that. Oh! how could I ever doubt you?"

"Your suspicions were natural, but I will say that your conduct was the cause of my marrying Alicia. I knew she desired it, but I never dreamed of marrying her until that night when your scorn drove me to suddenly announce that we were engaged—which was not a fact—and then I went on. But my punishment followed."

"The night of your father's death, and probably at the very time of the tragedy, Alicia and I were walking by the river-bank. It was not my desire—she captured me on my way home. She was in a reckless mood, and she told me a peculiar story that night. A rejected suitor had followed her to Bullion Bar, and she had horse-whipped him to get rid of him."

"On our wedding night she gave me another version of this affair; she said she had stabbed him to the heart and flung him in the river. Perhaps her mind was not right; the reason she gave for telling me was peculiar. She said that, now she was my wife, she thought I ought to know. The revelation nearly destroyed my reason—I was married to a murderess! We had a scene that night, of which Stamford saw a part, and, not knowing the cause, he was greatly amazed by our odd conduct."

"Thank Heaven, this crime was not actually committed. Alicia did strike the man with a knife, but he lived and is alive to-day. Enough of him, except to say that I have been paying Jake Sharkey for months to keep the secret. I suspect that he thinks I am paying him for another reason. If so, a want of full understanding has been the cause of his mistake."

"By the way, you heard of my walking with Alicia that night, through an anonymous letter. Bradlock Cowles wrote it. He saw us, really believed I might have been concerned in your father's death, and, meaning well, notified you."

"From the time I entered Cephas Stamford's house I had one great object in view—to get proof necessary to establish my claim to the Stamford property, and to set my father right in the eyes of the world. I soon became convinced that such proofs existed in an old safe which Stamford had, but I was long at a loss how to get them."

"One night, a short time ago, Alicia opened the safe, and I managed to get the coveted papers from her. They proved all I desired to know, and made me absolute master of the situation. Cephas Stamford must yield to me what he has so long held wrongfully."

"Bradlock Cowles proves to be a detective who was working up the case, but he never suspected who I was. He played some sharp cards to get his end, but is a thoroughly honorable man."

"Strangest of all, appearances indicated that Bess Sharkey is my own sister. Years ago Cephas hired one Meg Warner to steal 'Ralph's child.' He did not know that a second had just been born. Meg stole, not me, but my infant sister, and Bess is she. The robbery alarmed my mother, who fled with me and finally married your father's brother, little suspecting the fortune to which I was heir."

"There have been some sneers at her because she was poor, but, thank Heaven, there is no taint on her name."

"In conclusion I will say that, as Draper, I have tried to atone for my treachery, and to help you. Now, as sole owner of Montana Mill, I hand you the deed to the same as a gift. As soon as is possible I leave for Europe, so I have come to say farewell."

Redgrave ceased speaking, and looked earnestly at Lucia. She had listened closely to all he said, and with more calmness than was to be expected.

She now replied steadily:

"Mr. Redgrave, I feel sorry to hear you talk of making atonement. You have fully justified

all you have done, and I can only wonder at your firmness under such trials. As for me, what do I not owe you? Time and again, in your true character, and as Draper, you have saved my life. For this I can only say that you have my eternal gratitude. Your bravery is something wonderful, but it does not equal your moral heroism. All this I can freely say, but—I cannot accept Montana Mill as a present!"

She spoke firmly, and meant all that she said, but Paul Redgrave had not come there to be baffled.

Up to that time he had conquered all obstacles in his path, and it was no time to let failure meet him.

He insisted, and when he left the house Lucia had the deed. She had agreed to hold Montana Mill for two years, and then he would write her from Europe and settle the matter decisively.

And so there was a new sensation for Bullion Bar. Cephas Stamford was gone, and it was said he had agreed to sail promptly for Australia if allowed to depart. Paul Redgrave ruled in his stead, and called Bess Sharkey his sister. Lucia held Montana Mill, and Cowles posed as a detective. Adam Brotherton was charged with being Horace Brotherton's murderer, and the man in the red shirt said it was a sure case; while Sharkey looking for freedom, found himself held for killing Meg Warner.

Truly, there was sensation enough for Bullion Bar.

But Adam and Sharkey were never tried. The former tried to escape, and, being betrayed by the latter, first shot the boatman and was then brought down himself, by the alert man in the red shirt. Two knaves thus went off the stage together, and the world was the better for it.

Mr. Jack Wells was duly environed by indignant Lawyer Barlow, and sent to prison for a short term for perjury.

Hurst, Lucia's companion in that wild night adventure in the mountains, singularly enough, appeared at the Bar, alive. He had been saved from the flood by a dweller in the hills, and nursed back to health. He came to ask Lucia's forgiveness, received it, and then went his way.

Redgrave found that Bess was in truth his own sister, and would have taken her with him to Europe, but Bradlock Cowles had a word to say about that. That young man decided that he had rather live with Bess than be a detective, and Bess thought a husband a very desirable acquisition.

So Paul attended their wedding, and then went to Europe alone.

Two years later. Such a lapse of time often makes great changes. How has it been with our characters?

Montana Mill still runs, but it is owned by one John Smith. Who he is we do not know, but he has lately bought of Lucia Brotherton. His overseer, Lot Peterson, can give considerable information about the new owner and the old—especially the latter. There is also a recollection of a certain Cephas Stamford there, but no one can say positively what has become of him.

"Probably in Australia," says Lawyer Barlow, taking a long pull at his cigar.

"And your friend, Jack Wells?"

"Ha! that whimpering scoundrel! He's just got another sentence, this time for horse-stealing. Hope he'll stay there, for he's the biggest rascal I ever knew!"

Many miles from Bullion Bar there are two homes, side by side. In one lives Bradlock Cowles and his wife, Bess, and both agree that theirs is the happiest of all homes—"unless it is Redgrave's!"

For Paul has come back from Europe, and is their neighbor. If he had not come back, or if he had not married Lucia, this story would never have been told. He did both, and the couple, reunited after many dark clouds had crossed their paths, are sincerely happy at last. Nothing but death can part them again.

Paul has never taken the name of Stamford. It is disagreeable to him, and would only serve to recall the bitter past. He and Lucia do not wish to remember those days—the days when he was a renegade.

They look only at the present and future, and there are peace, prosperity and happiness.

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